

HOW ENGLAND SAVED EUROPE



W. H. FITCHETT

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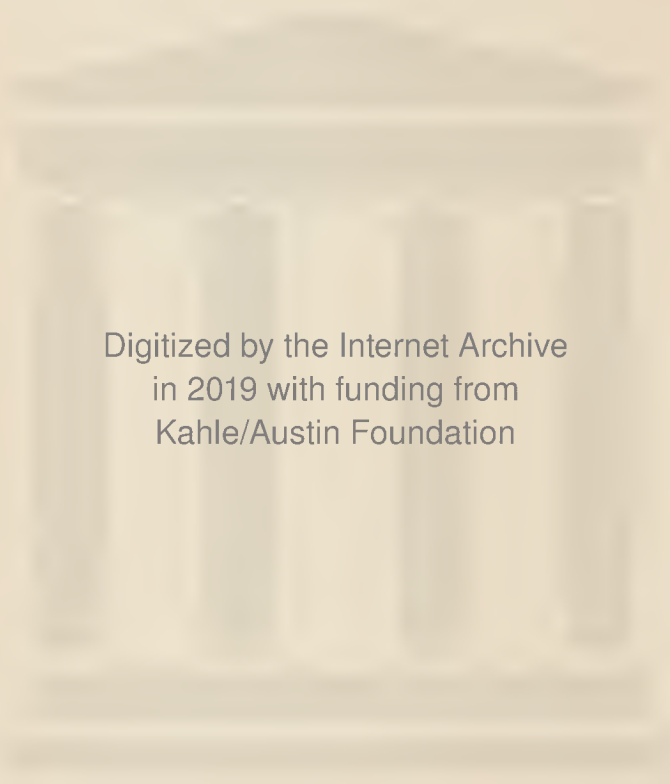
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HOW ENGLAND SAVED EUROPE



NELSON

IN THE DRESS HE WORE WHEN HE RECEIVED HIS MORTAL WOUND,
OCTOBER 21, 1805

From an engraving after the painting by A. W. DEVIS

HOW ENGLAND SAVED EUROPE:

THE STORY OF THE
GREAT WAR (1793-1815)

BY

W. H. FITCHETT, B.A., LL.D.

AUTHOR OF "DEEDS THAT WON THE EMPIRE"
"FIGHTS FOR THE FLAG," ETC.

WITH PORTRAITS, FACSIMILES, AND PLANS

IN FOUR VOLUMES

VOLUME II

THE STRUGGLE FOR THE SEA

SECOND IMPRESSION

LONDON

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1900

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"England has saved herself by her exertions, and will, as I trust, save Europe by her example."—PITT'S LAST PUBLIC WORDS.

"A people which takes no pride in the noble achievements of remote ancestors will never achieve anything worthy to be remembered with pride by remote descendants."—MACAULAY.

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PERIOD IV

*NELSON AND THE STRUGGLE
FOR THE SEA*

PERIOD IV.—THE STRUGGLE FOR THE SEA

(From the Confederacy of the Northern Powers, March 4, 1801, to the outbreak of Peninsular War, May 30, 1808.)

GENERAL CHRONOLOGICAL TABLE

1801.	Feb.	4.	Peace of Lunçville betwixt France and Austria.
	Mar.	4.	League of armed neutrality—The Northern Powers combine against England.
	„	23.	British fleet under Sir Hyde Parker and Lord Nelson pass Sound.
	April	2.	Battle of Copenhagen.
	„	3.	Prussia seizes Hanover.
	June	1.	Embargo taken off ships of Russia, Sweden, and Denmark.
	Sept.	2.	Surrender of Alexandria and capitulation of French troops in Egypt.
	Oct.	1.	Preliminaries of peace between England and France.
	„	10.	Peace ratified.
	Nov.	9.	Celebration of Peace of Paris.
	Dec.	14.	Great French armament sails for San Domingo.
1802.	Jan.	25.	Bonaparte President of Italian Republic.
	Mar.	25.	Treaty of Amiens between France and England signed.
	April	17.	Concordat published at Paris.
	„	24.	English militia disbanded.
	May	26.	Bonaparte First Consul for life.
	June	26.	Ligurian Republic established.
	Aug.	25.	First Consul forbids circulation of English newspapers in France.

1802. Oct. 21. French troops enter Switzerland.
 „ 23. Parma and Placcnza annexed by France.
1803. May 12. Lord Whitworth (English Ambassador) leaves Paris.
 „ 17. Great Britain declares war against France.
 „ 22. Bonaparte arrests all English visitors in France.
 June 14. Hanover occupied by French.
 „ 21. English colonial produce prohibited in France.
 Aug. 10. Scindia defeated by English.
 Sept. 23. Battle of Assaye.
 Nov. 19. French surrender San Domingo to blacks.
 Dec. 9. Panic of French invasion in England—Yeomen and volunteers in Great Britain, 379,943—Blockade of French ports.
1804. Feb. 15. French fleet defeated by homeward bound Indianmen under Captain Dance.
 Mar. 21. Execution of Duc d'Enghien.
 May 12. Change of British Ministry—Pitt again Premier.
 „ 18. Bonaparte declared Emperor of France with title of Napoleon I.
 Oct. 4. Nelson attacks Boulogne flotilla.
 „ 29. Spanish treasure frigates captured.
 Nov. 1. Sir George Rumboldt (British Minister) seized in Germany by French, and carried off to France.
 „ 15. Holkar defeated by English.
 Dec. 2. Napoleon crowned by Pope at Paris.
1805. Jan. 24. War declared by England against Spain.
 Mar. 29. Villeneuve escapes from Toulou—Nelson in pursuit.
 April 3. Treaty of Petersburg—Third coalition against France.
 May 26. Napoleon crowned King of Italy at Milan.
 June 26. Impeachment of Lord Melville.
 July 22. Sir Robert Calder's action with Villeneuve.
 Aug. 20. Villeneuve enters Cadiz—Failure of Napoleon's naval combinations.
 Sept. 8. War between France, Russia and Austria.
 Oct. 17. Surrender of Mack at Ulm.
 „ 20. French pass the Adige.

1805. Oct. 21. Trafalgar.
 Nov. 4. Capture of French squadron by Strachan.
 „ 13. French enter Vienna.
 Dec. 2. Austerlitz.
 „ 6. Armistice between France and Austria.
 „ 26. Peace of Presburg.
1806. Jan. 8. Cape of Good Hope captured by English.
 „ 23. Death of Pitt.
 Feb. 5. Ministry of “All the Talents”—Lord Grenville Premier.
 „ 6. Duckworth defeats French fleet in West Indies.
 „ 15. Joseph Bonaparte king of Naples.
 Mar. 28. Prussia shuts her ports against British.
 April 5. War between England and Prussia.
 June 5. Louis Bonaparte king of Holland.
 „ 12. Lord Melville acquitted.
 July 2. Buenos Ayres taken by English.
 „ 4. Battle of Maida.
 „ 20. Peace between France and Russia.
 Aug. 12. Spaniards retake Buenos Ayres.
 Sept. 13. Death of Fox.
 Oct. 3. Jena.
 „ 6. Unsuccessful negotiations for peace—Fourth coalition.
- Nov. 20. Berlin Decree against English commerce.
 „ 28. French enter Warsaw.
1807. Jan. 1. Orders in Council in reply to Berlin Decree.
 „ 28. Peace between England and Prussia.
 Feb. 3. Montevideo taken by English.
 „ 8. Eylau.
 „ 19. Sir John Duckwood at Dardanelles.
 Mar. 2. Percival Prime Minister.
 „ 21. Alexandria surrenders to English under General Fraser.
 May 20. Danzig surrenders to French.
 „ 21. Fraser repulsed at Rosetta.
 June 14. Friedland.
 „ 25. The raft of Tilsit.
 July 5. General Whitelocke at Buenos Ayres.

1807. July 9. Peace between France and Prussia.
 „ 18. Copenhagen bombarded by an English fleet under Cathcart and Gambier.
 Sept. 2. Prussia prohibits commerce with England.
 „ 7. Danish fleet at Copenhagen surrendered.
 „ 23. Alexandria evacuated by English under Fraser.
 Nov. 1. Russia declares war against England.
 „ 16. Second Orders in Council blockading ports of France and her allies.
 „ 29. Portuguese royal family sail for Brazil.
 „ 30. French under Junot enter Lisbon.
 Dec. 1. Jerome Bonaparte king of Westphalia.
 „ 17. Bonaparte issues decree at Milan against intercourse with England.
 1808. Jan. 21. Kehl, Wesel, Cassel, and Flushing united to France.
 Mar. 19. King of Spain abdicates in favour of his son, Prince of Asturias.
 May 1. Charles IV. of Spain abdicates at Bayonne in favour of Bonaparte.

HOW ENGLAND SAVED EUROPE:

THE STORY OF THE GREAT WAR

(1793-1815)

CHAPTER I

THE RETURN FROM THE EAST

THE march of the French back from Acre to Egypt was attended with great suffering; it suggests, indeed, the retreat from Moscow translated into terms of heat. Thirst took the place of the frost, and plague of the Cossacks. The spirit of the French soldiers was broken; the plague was in their blood. Men fell stricken from the ranks as they marched, and their comrades had for them neither pity nor help. Bonaparte made all his officers give up their horses for the service of the sick and wounded; but in spite of this, the track of the retreating army was marked by a trail of dying and abandoned men.

At Jaffa there were French soldiers in the hospital too sick to be removed, yet to abandon them to the pursuing Arabs was death. According to a familiar story, Bonaparte poisoned 400 of these in order to save them from Turkish cruelty! This story is vehemently contradicted, and as vehemently asserted. That all the French sick were not thus poisoned is certain, for Sidney Smith found seven still alive when he visited the French hospital at Jaffa two days after Bonaparte had left. It is beyond doubt, however, that Bonaparte suggested to his doctors the expediency, if not the kindness, of poisoning such of his sick as could not be removed. The French doctors gravely debated the question, and, in the words of one of their number, decided "it was their business to cure men, not to kill them." Bonaparte at St. Helena denied that he actually gave orders for the poisoning of the sick, but he contended that, if he had done so, he would have performed a righteous and humane act. Marshal Bertrand, in the same conversation at St. Helena, declared it was a universal belief throughout the French army that the sick had been poisoned.

Mourad Bey had emerged afresh during Bonaparte's absence in Syria, and was giving trouble; there had been one or two partial insurrections, suppressed with great cruelty. But the one serious danger which menaced Bonaparte was the appear-

ance of a fleet of a hundred Turkish ships in Aboukir Bay, bringing a force of 15,000 troops for the expulsion of the French from Egypt. The Turks landed and entrenched themselves on the peninsula while waiting for the appearance of Mourad Bey, whose Mamelukes were to give the expedition what it wanted—an active cavalry. Bonaparte, with three divisions under Lannes, Murat, and Bon, marched at speed, and with characteristic energy, to crush the invading force. “This battle,” he said to Murat, before the fight began, “will decide the fate of the world”—a sphinx-like sentence which sorely puzzled Murat, who was a good cavalry officer, but no politician. Why should one more victory over a Turkish army in Egypt “decide the fate of the world”?

The battle of Aboukir, fought on July 25, was a victory for the French of an almost unique kind. The Turkish army was not so much overthrown as destroyed. The French cavalry charged so fiercely on the broken Turks, that the maddened human rout, with its terror and tumult, was swept into the sea, and, according to Bonaparte’s own arithmetic, nearly 9000 fugitives were drowned. A single dramatic incident in this wild scene is worth recording. One drowning and fugitive Albanian was dragged from the crowds of perishing Turks into Sidney Smith’s own boat. That rescued Albanian, pulled gasping into the *Tigre’s* gig, was Mchemet

Ali, then a nameless soldier in the Turkish ranks, but destined to found a great dynasty in Egypt, and to die nearly fifty years afterwards, having accomplished in the East nearly all that Napoleon himself dreamed of, but failed to achieve. If that dripping and half-drowned Albanian had not been saved by the rough hands of British sailors from amongst the crowds of perishing fugitives, the history of Egypt would have been different; and, amongst other details, Fraser's inglorious expedition in 1807 might not have ended in mere slaughter and shame.

The real value of the victory of Aboukir to Bonaparte was that it gave him a chance of returning to Europe with at least a respectable amount of glory. The Egyptian expedition was a failure. It had already cost France a fleet; it was almost certain to cost it an army. Undertaken to thrust England out of the Mediterranean, its result had been to make the British flag supreme in that sea. Bonaparte was naturally eager to disentangle himself from such a fiasco, and appear afresh—with some decent nimbus of victory round his head—in France, where a throne was to be lost or won. It was because he saw behind the defeat of the Turkish army the return to France that he said to Murat the battle "would decide the fate of the world."

After the battle Sidney Smith sent to Bonaparte, under a flag of truce, a packet of newspapers which

told the dolorous tale of French disasters in Europe during the last ten months. Bonaparte spent the whole night reading that tale of domestic unrest and foreign defeat. The coalition against France had revived; Turkey and Russia had joined it. The French were hard pressed from Amsterdam to Naples. Suwarroff, the greatest general Russia has ever produced, had applied to French generals something of Bonaparte's own methods against the Austrians in 1796, and with startling results. MacDonald was crushed by him on the Trebbia and Joubert at Novi. Mantua had fallen. Moreau had saved his army only by a skilful but disastrous retreat. It was necessary for Bonaparte's plans that the Directory should be discredited by foreign disasters, and these disasters had certainly come in troops.

Civil war, moreover, had broken out in the west of France, and against the Chouans the infamous law of hostages had been passed, a law which made a whole class responsible for the shot of a single peasant. In each district all persons related to the emigrants, or to the ancient régime, were held as hostages for the good behaviour of the entire district. Their property was made liable for all robberies which occurred, and four of them were transported for every assassination reported. Jacobinism, too, had lifted up its menacing head in Paris. The elections of May 1799 were unfavourable to the

Directory, and that body had been reconstructed, and a Jacobin leaven infused into it. Bonaparte calculated, with reasonable certainty, that he had only to appear on such a distracted stage and the supreme power would inevitably fall to him.

The strain of superstitious fatalism in Bonaparte's character is shown by a curious incident. During the fierce struggle in the trenches before Acre news reached him that a French gunboat on the Nile, named the *Italy*, had been attacked by the Arabs and blown up. Bonaparte accepted it as an omen. He said to Bourrienne, "Italy is lost to France! All is over! My presentiments never deceive me!" No logic could shake that superstitious belief; and when, after the battle of Aboukir, he read the newspapers Sidney Smith had sent him, his imagination at once ran back to the omen of the ill-fated *Italy* on the Nile. "My presentiments," he said, "did not deceive me. Italy is lost!"

He took his steps with characteristic decision. Two frigates were secretly prepared for the return to France, only Berthier and Gantheaume being allowed to know Bonaparte's intentions. He himself returned to Cairo, gathered round him the staff he proposed to take with him, and announced that he was starting on a visit to Upper Egypt. But as soon as he had left Cairo he changed his route, and pushed at speed to the sea-coast. He wrote to Kleber transferring to him the command of the

army, and assigning a rendezvous with him, for purposes of consultation, at which he knew Kleber could not possibly be present. Kleber was clear-sighted, plain-spoken, and choleric; an interview with him would have been decidedly unpleasant. On the night of August 22, Bonaparte set sail, leaving behind him an infuriated successor, a disgusted army, and a wrecked adventure. Kleber soothed his own angry feelings by writing a wrathful despatch to the Directory. This, however, fell into the hands of the British, and when at last it reached Paris the Directory had vanished, and Bonaparte himself, now become First Consul, had the grim satisfaction of reading it. "Fortune," says Lanfrey, "had changed the accused into a judge, and had prepared for each his recompense; for one the poniard of a fanatic, for the other the first throne in the world."

Bonaparte, stealing from the shores of Egypt under cover of night, leaving behind him the gallant army which had followed his fortunes with such devotion, is not a very noble figure; but his characteristic good fortune followed him. Sidney Smith had sailed to Cyprus for supplies, and the sea was clear. Instead of taking the ordinary course, the French frigates crept along the African coast; it was three weeks before they sighted Tunis. Under the shelter of darkness the ships stole, with all lights hidden, through the narrow waters betwixt

Sicily and Africa, patrolled by a couple of Nelson's ships, and, after a six weeks' voyage, reached Corsica.

Two plans were open to Bonaparte: he might land in Italy, assume command of the French army, win some dramatic victory, and then appear in Paris as the saviour of the nation; or he might sail direct for France, and reach Paris with the least possible delay. In Paris things were swiftly moving to a crisis; and Bonaparte, who knew, as few men ever did, how precious a factor in great events time is, decided to waste no priceless moments in winning a theatrical victory in Italy. Nay, there seemed some risk that Bonaparte, in the rôle of a saviour, might be superfluous. Bernadotte was Minister of War, and had begun to infuse both energy and method into the military operations of France. Massena had won some brilliant victories over the Austrians in that brief campaign known as the battle of Zürich. The combined English and Russian expedition to Holland had already failed, and failed ignobly.

Bonaparte quickly made his choice. If he lingered much longer he felt he might be regarded as unnecessary. On October 8 he set sail for the French coast; but as night was falling the white sails of a British squadron showed on the western sky-line coming swiftly down before the wind. Gantheaume wished to put back to Corsica, but Bonaparte insisted on keeping the course for France. The night which

followed was a time of singular agitation for Bonaparte. To become a British prisoner when in sight not only of the French coast, but of what Bonaparte's matchless intuition told him was a French throne, would indeed be a stroke of cruel fortune. Bonaparte resolved, if no other chance of escape offered, to man a boat, abandon the frigates, and pull to the French coast. In the interests of painters and rhetoricians it is to be regretted that this course was not adopted. The spectacle of the greatest soldier of modern days, who had sailed from France on a scheme of conquest, with a great fleet and a gallant army, returning unattended and in a cockboat, would at least have been dramatic. But the British ships mistook Gantheaume's frigates for Venetians, and kept peacefully on their course.

Early in October the despatch announcing Bonaparte's victory over the Turks at Aboukir was read in the Council of the Five Hundred. It was the first definite intelligence from Egypt which had reached France for months. Bonaparte and his army had vanished from the gaze of France behind the clouds of battle-smoke which arose above the contending fleets in Aboukir Bay. Suddenly the smoke was blown aside, and Bonaparte appeared once more, wearing a halo of victory! On October 15, while Paris was yet full of the exultation of the news from Egypt, another piece of intelligence startled France. Bonaparte had landed in Corsica; he was on his way

to Paris ! Not only the fact, but the time and manner of Bonaparte's return kindled the general French imagination. He brought back, it is true, neither fleet nor army, but he came from a land of mystery with the tale of strange victories, and in the hour of France's need. France wanted another 1796; a hero to lead her armies to yet more dazzling conquests. And in a moment the general imagination took fire, the hopes and fears of all contending parties found a centre in "the hero of Egypt."

The political situation when Bonaparte returned to Paris was very curious. He found awaiting him not so much a conspiracy as a nest of conspiracies. The Jacobins were conspiring against the Directory, and the members of the Directory were conspiring against each other. All Bonaparte's political alliances had hitherto been with the Jacobins; he found, too, that military opinion was on their side as against a cluster of imbecile civilians, who had so mismanaged the war. But, with his incomparable shrewdness, Bonaparte soon realised that another Jacobin régime was impossible. Its bloody history fatally discredited that party. France would not risk a second Reign of Terror, a new Robespierre. Bonaparte had to choose betwixt Barras and Sieyès in the Directory itself. Sieyès was the ablest member in the Directory, and was also the most active conspirator for its overthrow. He could not forgive the existing constitution for having taken the

place of the one he had himself framed. At first Bonaparte stood coldly aloof from Sieyès. At some dinner-party, indeed, he even affected not to see him. "Do you observe," cried Sieyès in anger, "that insolent little fellow's behaviour towards a member of a Government which ought to have had him shot?"

Bonaparte and Sieyès, however, found they needed each other. The one must be the lawyer of the new constitution, and the other its man of action. Sieyès had shrewdness enough to see that his new ally would use him and fling him aside. "I know," he said, "the fate that awaits me." On November 9, only four weeks after Bonaparte had returned from Egypt, the *coup d'état* took place. Bonaparte was made commander of all the troops in Paris. The Councils were summoned to meet at St. Cloud, where a proposal for the reform of the constitution was ready to be submitted. The proposal would certainly be accepted in the Council of the Ancients, but in the Council of the Five Hundred the Jacobin element was strong, and this was the point of peril. Sieyès was to have made his appearance in this Council when the opposition grew dangerous; but his courage failed him. He could frame constitutions, but he could not make them march. Bonaparte had to take the part from which Sieyès shrunk. He appeared in the Council, was met with angry shouts and hustled out of it. He then sent

in his grenadiers to clear the hall and rescue his brother Lucien, who was president.

That night Lucien held a meeting of such members of the Council as belonged to his own faction—only thirty in number. It assumed the functions of the whole Chamber. A committee was named to report on the state of affairs. Its report advised that Sieyès, Bonaparte, and Roger Duclos should be a provisional executive, with the title of Consuls, and, with the help of twenty members from each Council, should frame the new constitution—the meetings of both Councils being meanwhile suspended, and the Council of the Five Hundred being energetically purged of objectionable members.

The provisional Consulate lasted a little over four weeks, and Bonaparte emerged from it the absolute master of France, with the title of First Consul, and with despotic powers which Louis XIV. might have envied. The final result of the Revolution, of the agitations and storms, the massacres and the sufferings of the ten years since 1789, was thus to set up in France a monarchy more absolute than that of the Bourbons, and to place on the throne of France a soldier with the unchecked powers of a despot, and with an ambition more greedy, if not more pitiless, than perhaps that of any other conqueror known to history.

CHAPTER II

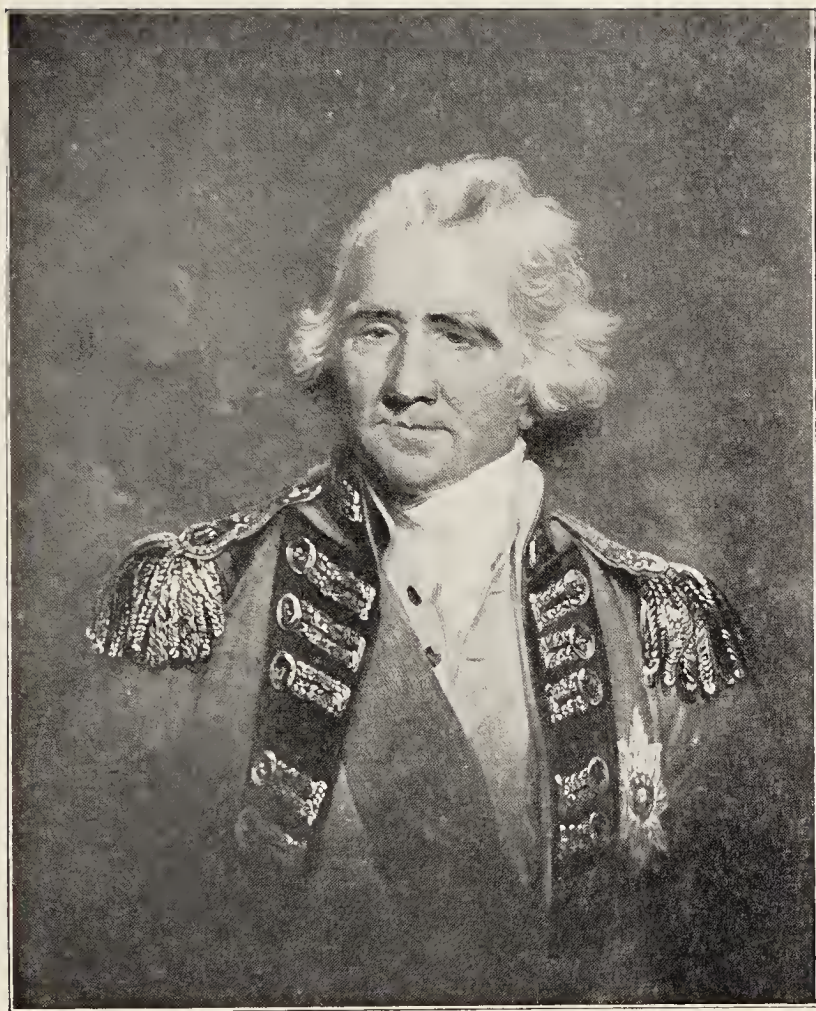
WASTED EXPEDITIONS

THE British campaign which ended the Egyptian episode in the Napoleonic wars is worth telling in detail, as being that which restored the sorely damaged prestige of the British army, and the first in which Great Britain won on land a distinct, not to say a brilliant, advantage over France. The blaze of a hundred victories won by British soldiers in the later stages of the great war, from the Peninsula to Waterloo, hides in merciful obscurity the failures and disasters of previous years. On the sea Great Britain was splendidly victorious; but the story of her arms on land during the first eight years of the strife is a catalogue of blunders and of capitulations; of absurd expeditions, begun without sane plans, conducted without rational leadership, and ended with more or less of ignominy.

It was not that Great Britain had no army; her statesmen did not know how to use it, nor her generals how to lead it. The art of victory seemed to have temporarily emigrated from the British army. British sailors during that period never went into battle

without a confident expectation of winning. British soldiers never embarked on an expedition without a gloomy conviction that they would return with diminished numbers and shrunken credit. And history usually fulfilled those cheerful expectations.

The story of the Duke of York's inglorious campaign in Holland has been already told, and it was but the first of a series of costly and bloody failures. Thus in 1799 the British Cabinet conceived the idea of despatching an expedition to North Holland for the purpose of expelling the French, and giving back to the Prince of Orange his lost dominions. Russia was to join England in the adventure, England supplying all the cash, and each Power contributing not less than 18,000 troops, the joint expedition to be under the command of the Duke of York. That general's previous performances in Flanders were a sufficient guarantee of failure; but, as a still further precaution against success, he was instructed to do nothing without the consent of a Council of War composed of six generals! The point in Holland most difficult for attack was chosen for the landing of the troops, and on August 13, 1799, Sir Ralph Abercromby sailed with 10,000 men for Helder, this being the advance-guard of the expedition. Abercromby himself was a much experienced Scottish soldier, as brave as his own sword, but singularly unlucky in war; and he was quite persuaded the expedition must fail. "My



SIR RALPH ABERCROMBY

from a mezzotint after the portrait by J. HOPPNER, R.A.

mind," he wrote to a friend just before sailing, "always went in opposition to this undertaking." "It involved perils," he said, "which ought not to be risked." Thus an expedition which began without a plan was conducted by a general without a hope!

The British private of that day, or of any day, seldom failed, however, in fighting quality. The troops were landed on August 27, in wild weather, through a heavy surf, and in much confusion; but the stubborn British infantry, without any help from artillery, stormed the sand-dunes which overlooked their landing-place and drove roughly back the Dutch troops which opposed them. Nearly 500 men, however, perished in the landing. The Helder was reached, and a small Dutch fleet lying there, consisting of seven ships of the line and several frigates, was captured, with a great supply of military stores. If the expedition had closed at this point it would have been a sufficiently creditable bit of work. But the Russian contingent arrived, the Duke of York, with his absurd military council, took command, and the allied troops began the task of fighting their way to Amsterdam through the long defile of North Holland.

The weather was bitter; the country was a network of marshes and canals, broken by sandhills held in great force by the French and the Dutch. It is difficult to write with patience of the senile

generalship of the campaign. The Duke of York was brave enough in a passive fashion; he would, as Sir Henry Bunbury says, "stand all day to be shot at" cheerfully enough. But he had neither sense nor knowledge. He would talk at his dinner-table of his allies, or of his own officers, like a half-drunken boy; and under his management the Russian troops became nearly as hostile in temper as the French themselves. There was much hard fighting, and an infinite amount of still harder splashing along wet roads and through treacherous marshes; but all without sane plan or concert. The British regiments were flooded with men attracted by extraordinary bounties from the militia; there was not time even to clothe these raw recruits in the uniform of the regiments they joined. So when drawn up on parade, a British regiment offered to the eye of the astonished spectator a bewildered patchwork of different uniforms. The troops, in a word, were as raw as their generals were incompetent.

On September 19 the allied army set out from its lines, 35,000 strong, to fight its way to Amsterdam, expecting to reach that city in five days; but by October 9 it was back in its own lines, with its hopes wrecked, its discipline—such as it had—ruined, its ammunition exhausted, and having lost 10,000 of its bravest officers and men. There was much wrong-headed fighting, and British soldiers, perhaps,

never fought better or were worse led. Bunbury, as a proof of the unyielding spirit of the British soldier, tells the story of how, in the tumult and slaughter of the retreat, he tried to gather up a battalion for the purpose of holding a particular village. He failed in his efforts till he came across a battalion of the 1st Guards, resting on their arms in column in the muddy road, and he begged Colonel Maitland, who was in command, to return with him and hold the village against the advancing French. Maitland urged that his men had been fighting for hours and were totally exhausted; most of their officers were killed; they had no ammunition. Bunbury still urged the advance, but Maitland, he says, "appeared to have lost the powers of his mind under fatigue of body and anxiety. At this moment a grenadier, lifting his chin from the muzzle on which he was leaning, said in a loud and steady voice, 'Give us some more cartridges, and we will see what can be done.' The officers, who were anxiously clustering about us at the head of the column, caught up the prompter's word. Maitland cried, 'Shoulder arms!' They marched for Krabendam, and I galloped to find and bring to them a supply of ammunition."

When the allied forces regained their lines they were still 25,000 strong, with the British fleet in their rear. But their generals were without either plan or hope, and within a week they concluded a

capitulation by which they withdrew from Holland, surrendered the captured Helder, and gave a pledge that the British Government would send back to France 8000 French prisoners of war. It marks the complete bankruptcy of spirit in the leaders of the ill-fated expedition that they welcomed this ignoble capitulation with almost tearful gratitude. Abercromby wrote to a friend, "What could tempt the French to agree to it I cannot conceive. One-half this army must have fallen into their hands, with all our artillery, stores, &c." Abercromby, however, is the one figure who emerges with undamaged credit from this inglorious expedition, and the British Government wished to reward his services with a peerage, a large sum of money, or a grant of Caribbean lands. But Abercromby rejected the proposal. Such an expedition, he said in substance, supplied no argument for "rewarding" anybody!

Another illustration of the manner in which the British Cabinet, to quote Sheridan's phrase, "nibbled at the rind of France," is supplied by the Ostend adventure. It occurred to some official wiseacre that to blow up the sluice gates near Ostend would be a delightfully annoying act to the French, and in May 1798 a brigade of picked troops, under General Coote, was despatched for that purpose. The troops landed, and duly blew up the sluices, and then discovered that the furious surf running made it impossible to re-embark. It was impracticable, of

course, for a single English brigade, however gallant, to fight the whole of France, and, after resisting till half their numbers had fallen, the survivors surrendered. A gallant brigade was thus sacrificed to destroy a sluice gate!

In December 1799, General Sir Charles Stuart, who had captured Minorea in 1798, and was then commander of the forces in the Mediterranean, submitted to the British Cabinet a daring and very able plan. He proposed that 15,000 British troops should be placed under his command, with which he would establish himself on the Maritime Alps and cut the French communications with Italy. Had this plan been carried out promptly and with energy, Genoa, where Massena was being besieged, must have fallen a month earlier than it actually did, and Melas, the Austrian commander-in-chief, would have been strengthened with 20,000 seasoned troops to meet Napoleon as he crossed the St. Bernard. Marengo, in that case, might well have been a French defeat, and the whole course of history have been changed. The British Cabinet, thankful for anybody who would invent a plan for it, accepted Stuart's proposals, and that general promptly organised his staff. After six weeks' loitering meditation, however, the British Government informed Stuart that they could only send him 10,000 men; and in six weeks more the 10,000 shrank to 5000, and Sir Charles Stuart, a man of impatient and

resentful temper, threw up the whole scheme in disgust.

The 5000 men intended for Stuart were by this time, however, actually on board transports, and they must be sent somewhere. After remaining at their anchorage till the end of April, they were sent to Minorca and placed under the orders of Sir Ralph Abercromby. Here was a British army afloat in the Mediterranean, but with nothing particular for it to do! Sir Ralph took his forces to Genoa, intending to strengthen the garrison of that place, but arrived there too late. Marengo had been fought, and the French were in possession. The troops were then taken—apparently for safety—to Leghorn, and the Queen of Naples used all her arts to induce Abercromby to land his men there and take up the war in Italy against Bonaparte. But that cautious Scotsman was not to be tempted. No doubt 10,000 British troops in the mountain passes betwixt Florence and Bologna would have greatly helped the Austrians, but Abercromby had “no orders,” and was not the man to act without them.

Another British army, it is to be noted, was at the same time afloat in another part of the Mediterranean, on board a squadron under the command of Sir Edward Pellew, looking about, in an equally imbecile fashion, for something to be attacked. They were directed to make a descent upon Belleisle. The

expedition accordingly sailed, looked at Belleisle, decided it was too strong to be meddled with, and then, as Bunbury says, sailed away, "unharming and unharmed," some of the troops returning to England, others sailing to Minorca.

The next attempt to "do something" was made at Ferrol, against which place Sir James Pultney sailed with a considerable fleet and a fine body of troops. Pultney landed, had a brisk skirmish with the Spaniards, looked at Ferrol from the summit of the neighbouring hills, and then re-embarked, having decided that "nothing could be done." The soldiers sniffed contemptuously at the sailors as the cause of the failure, and the sailors swore round naval oaths at the soldiers for their useless promenade. More gunpowder, in fact, was burned in duels betwixt these two branches of the service over the Ferrol expedition than was expended against the enemy.

In August, orders reached Abercromby to join Pultney at Gibraltar, taking 10,000 men from Minorca, and make a joint descent on Cadiz. On October 4, just as the equinoctial gales commenced to rage, the expedition was off Cadiz. Keith was in command of the fleet, while no less than 22,000 men, exclusive of officers, crowded into 120 transports, formed the army under Abercromby's orders. The expedition, in a word, was on a scale which, wisely used for some fit end, might have produced

far-reaching results. Abercromby proposed to disembark at Rota, and orders were issued to land at that place. But the boats of the squadron could only carry 3000 men; the ships were ten miles from shore; the sea was rough. It was known that 8000 Spanish troops were drawn up to resist the landing, and at that moment Keith reported to Abercromby that in the state of the weather he could not guarantee to maintain communications with the troops if they landed, or to take them off again, if retreat became necessary.

To throw 3000 troops ashore at nightfall, without artillery and without support, in the presence of a hostile force double their numbers, would be madness. The troops climbed back from their tossing boats to the ships, and Abercromby called on Keith to take the responsibility of saying that he could, or that he could not, land and re-embark the troops. But Keith would say nothing definite, and his huge fleet lay rolling in the sea off Cadiz waiting for a clear resolve to be reached by somebody. At two o'clock on the morning of October 6, Sir Ralph, says his biographer, "left his bed and went to the cot of Lord Keith, demanding his decision." The spectacle of the venerable Sir Ralph—he was nearly seventy years of age—in a nightcap, waking the almost equally venerable Keith—probably also in a nightcap—at two o'clock in the morning to learn whether he had come to any

“decision” about landing the troops is not without its humour. But the fate of an army of 22,000 gallant men hung on those two night-capped heads.

Keith, it seemed, had no “decision” about him. The expedition was abandoned. Half the troops, under Pultney, sailed for Lisbon, the other half, under Abercromby, returned to Minorca. It seemed probable that the British army in the Mediterranean would repeat the fabled experiences of the Flying Dutchman, and be for ever unable to land anywhere. Yet this army, blown of the vagrant winds to all quarters of the heavens, was really the *corps d’élite* of Great Britain, and surpassed in numbers and equipment the troops which Wellington—during most stages of the Peninsular war, at least—had under his standards.

The effect on the soldiers themselves may be imagined. “The troops,” says Sir Robert Wilson, “from so long a continuance at sea and in weather so violent, began to sink in mind and strength.” The necessity of doing something with this army, in order to save both its reason and its health, was really one of the motives which inspired the expedition to Egypt in 1801—an expedition whose brilliant success restored the tarnished fame of the British soldier, and gave him back his ancient place of pride as the best fighting material known to history.

Other reasons—some wise, and some mistaken—

moved the British Cabinet to this new adventure. The presence of the French in Egypt was a perpetual menace to the interests of England in India. Bonaparte, now First Consul, and the victor of Marengo, was making desperate efforts to restore the French power in the Mediterranean, and if he succeeded, Egypt might well become permanently a French possession. In any case, if peace were proposed, it would be an enormous advantage to Bonaparte in the negotiations which must follow if the Tricolour still flew over Egypt. He would make that fact an argument for demanding concessions elsewhere, or even for making the permanent occupation of Egypt a condition of peace. It would neutralise that advantage to France if, when negotiations for peace began, a British force was at least contesting the possession of Egypt with the French.

It is an incidental proof of the curious want of wisdom which so often marked the British conduct of this war, that a year earlier Sir Sidney Smith had concluded—or rather had endorsed—at El Arish a treaty with Kleber, the French commander-in-chief, for the entire abandonment of Egypt. But Sidney Smith had no technical right to pledge Great Britain to any such treaty, and his act was promptly disavowed. The British Government, in a word, could have obtained in 1799, without firing a shot and without the expenditure of sixpence, the very advantage for which,

in 1801, it had to pay the price of uncounted gold and the blood of many thousands of brave men; and that opportunity was thrown away!

Kleber had, by this time, fallen under the knife of an assassin, but his letters to the Directory, written in the mood of anger and despair kindled by the sudden departure of Bonaparte from Egypt, had been captured by the English. These communications naturally took their tint from Kleber's temper, rather than his judgment. They drew an absurdly gloomy picture of the French position. Everything, Kleber declared, was ruined. There was much debt and no gunpowder. The soldiers were either sick or helpless. Nothing was possible to the army but irretrievable disaster. How wrong-headed was Kleber's account of the French power in Egypt is proved by the fact that, immediately after writing it, Kleber himself was able to inflict two decisive defeats on the Mamelukes; and on March 20 at Heliopolis—after the Convention of El Arish, that is, had been disavowed by the British Government—he won over the army of the Grand Vizier, 40,000 strong, a victory more brilliant, perhaps, than any Bonaparte himself won on Egyptian soil.

The British Cabinet, however, took Kleber's wrath-tinted syllables for exact statistics. It was persuaded that the French troops in Egypt numbered only 15,000 or 16,000, with little ammunition and less hope, many of them sick, and all of them dis-

contented. As a matter of fact, the French force in Egypt exceeded 32,000 men, abundantly equipped and in perfect fighting efficiency; they were in unchallenged possession of the entire country, with all its fortresses and harbours. And against an army of this strength Abercromby was despatched with a force of not quite 15,000 men! But here, at last, British soldiers had, if not a fair field, yet a field on which their native valour had a fair opportunity of displaying itself, unfettered by the blunders of statesmen and the sloth of incompetent generals.

The plan of the British Cabinet was, if not grand, at least grandiose. Sir Ralph Abercromby, with nearly 16,000 troops, was to sail from Minorca to the mouth of the Nile; a great Turkish army was to march from Syria, cross the desert, and attack the French from the east; while an Indian force, under Sir David Baird, was to ascend the Red Sea, and march from Suez to Cairo. The plan, that is, took in three continents, and soldiers of all tints and nationalities.

But combinations spread over so vast an area of land and sea, and which depended for their success on the punctuality of Turkish generals, and the capacity of the British transports of that period to run to time betwixt Bombay and Suez, were naturally exposed to many risks. The hope of Turkish help proved, after the fashion of such

hopes, the idlest of dreams. Baird's lumbering transports, storm-buffed and sorely strained, did not appear in the Red Sea till the campaign was virtually decided. Abercromby's troops alone made their appearance off the Egyptian coast according to agreement. The plan of a convergence of armed forces upon the French in Egypt from three widely remote points—dusky Sepoys through the Red Sea, undrilled Turkish battalions from Asia Minor, and sober British infantry from the Mediterranean—broke down in two of its elements, as was inevitable, at the very outset. How hopelessly wrong was the estimate of the British Cabinet as to the strength of the French in Egypt may be judged from a single fact. That estimate gave 15,000 as the number of French troops in Egypt. After all the fighting of the campaign the number of French troops who capitulated at Cairo and Alexandria amounted to 24,180.

CHAPTER III

THE BRITISH LANDING IN EGYPT

ON March 2, 1801, Abercromby's expedition dropped anchor in Aboukir Bay, the men-of-war riding on exactly the position the French ships had occupied in the battle of the Nile. The *Foudroyant*, indeed, actually chafed her cables against the sunken hull of the *Orient*, Brueys' ill-fated flagship, whose anchor she afterwards fished up. Counting transports and men-of-war, the fleet numbered 175 vessels, carrying 15,330 troops, as gallant a force as England ever sent forth to fight for her flag.

The expedition had, in one sense, many disadvantages. Its purpose was known. Major Mackarras and Major Fletcher, Abercromby's engineers, were sent in advance to examine and report on the proposed landing-place, and fell into the enemy's hands while doing so, Mackarras being shot. The enemy knew, therefore, the exact spot where it was intended to land. Just as the British fleet was casting anchor, too, a frigate suddenly bore up, separated itself from the crowd of ships,

and made a dash into the harbour of Alexandria. It was a French frigate, that, two nights previously, had run by ill-chance into the midst of the British fleet. With great cleverness its captain put as British a look as possible on his ship, and kept coolly on with the convoy until able to make a safe dash into Alexandria, taking with him, of course, full details of the expedition. Egypt, again, was for the British practically an unknown country. The Admiralty had supplied the expedition with a solitary and very bad map of the country, and with much wholly misleading information about the strength of the French in it.

But the spirit of the expedition was high. The men were eager to try their strength against the French. Edward Paget, then in command of the 28th, wrote to his father on August 7, "You may depend upon it that there is a certain devil in this army that will carry it through thick and thin. It is the first fair trial between Englishmen and Frenchmen, during the whole of this war, and at no former period of our history did John Bull ever hold his enemy cheaper." There was no loitering Duke of York, with a half-senile council of war, to paralyse the generalship. And Abercromby reckoned confidently—if unwisely—on the assistance of the 8000 troops from India under General Baird who were to land from the Red Sea and march across the desert to Cairo.

The wind blew fiercely till March 7, making landing impossible, but as night fell on that date, the sea and wind went down, and it was determined to disembark at once. The landing was a very brilliant and soldierly bit of work. Abercromby had seen the tumult and peril which attended the ill-arranged landing of the expedition in Holland on August 27, 1799, and had learnt his lesson, and the plan he adopted at Aboukir is yet the study and admiration of experts. The problem was to throw the troops ashore so that they would be instantly in fighting order, each regiment a unit, and each cluster of regiments an orderly brigade. The first line consisted of flat-bottomed boats, each boat holding fifty men, with an interval of fifty feet betwixt it and the next boat. Then came a line of ships' cutters, and one of towed launches. The second and third lines contained men of the same companies as those of the first line, and when the shore was reached these boats were to pull up in the fifty-foot intervals betwixt the boats in the first, so as to land simultaneously. Each boat was to drop a grapnel from its stern on nearing the beach, so as to warp off clear the moment the troops it carried had leaped ashore. The boats were grouped into divisions, each under a naval captain, and the lines at either flank were covered by gunboats.

The soldiers had orders to sit down in the bottom of the boats, to observe absolute silence, and not to

load till they landed. The effect of this arrangement was that 5000 men leaped on the beach at almost the same moment of time, and in companies, regiments, and brigades. They were instructed to fall into line just as they leaped ashore, and no soldier, or group of soldiers, thinking themselves out of place, were to close to either flank till ordered to do so by a senior officer. Some launches were fitted to carry field-pieces with artillerymen, so that they could run ashore in instant readiness for action.

At two o'clock on the morning of the 8th, while the Egyptian skies above them were still gleaming with innumerable stars, the troops in each transport stepped down into the waiting boats. The transports lay at a considerable distance from the shore, and the boats pulled slowly in to lighter vessels, previously stationed as a rendezvous, at little more than gunshot distance from the beach. Here the boats were drawn up in the order we have described. The men saw before them the sandy beach, commanded by low wind-blown ridges. On their right there was a steep sandhill whose front was commanded by the guns of the castle of Aboukir. The beach was crescent-shaped, and on the crest of the sandhills above, at regular intervals, were patches of colour, showing where the French were posted in great strength to resist the landing.

At eight o'clock the signal was given, and instantly the triple lines of boats, each carrying its cluster of

silent soldiers, was in movement, the pace of each boat being regulated by that on the extreme right. The sea was perfectly calm, and the spectacle one of the most picturesque imaginable. The strip of shining sea across which, in such perfect order, the long ranks of boats were creeping resembled the smooth floor of an amphitheatre. Seaward the great fleet of 175 ships formed a sort of wall of masts, crowded with sailors watching the sight; on the land the curving sandhills, for a mile and a half, were crested with the waiting French.

Presently from the sandhills, and from either flank, broke a hundred jets of white smoke. The French batteries had opened fire, and across sea and land rolled the thunder of their wrath. Sir Robert Wilson says that on the glassy sea the effect of the French fire was as though a furious hailstorm were sweeping over the shining floor of water; but the hailstones were bullets! The packed soldiers, however, kept their places; the seamen pulled steadily on. One boat after another was struck and sunk, but the others pushed on without pause. A broken and irregular cheer ran down the line of moving boats, a cheer in which there was a note of anger and challenge. The boats reached the shore almost simultaneously. In a moment the men leaped out, and along a curving front of a mile and a half, with scarcely a moment's delay, there was a steadfast line of armed men, with skirmishers running eagerly forward.

The very first man ashore is said to have been Colonel Brent Spencer, who commanded the 40th. As he leaped on the beach, a French soldier, according to the Regimental History, stepped from behind a hillock near, ran forward a few paces, and, lifting his musket, was about to shoot him. Spencer, however, lifted his cane—he carried no more formidable weapon—shook it at the Frenchman, and cried, “Oh, you scoundrel!” Spencer’s coolness, and, perhaps, the sudden vision of 5000 men falling instantly into line of battle within a few paces of him, shook the Frenchman’s nerve. He hesitated; then, without waiting to fire his musket, he turned and ran!

Moore, who commanded the right of the British line, led the 23rd and 28th and the flank companies of the 40th straight up the steep sandhill before them without firing a shot. Two French battalions in their road were broken into fragments by the vehemence of the British onfall, and four pieces of artillery were captured. Farther to the left, the 42nd and the 58th, under Brigadier Oakes, performed a similar feat with equal fire and daring. On the extreme left the Coldstreams, the 3rd Guards, and the 54th fell into some confusion. The boats carrying them ran into shoal water; the men had to wade ashore, and were charged by the French cavalry before they could form. For a moment, on the yielding sand and in the shallow water, there was a confused and desperate struggle, horsemen smiting

with swords at broken infantry-men, defending themselves with musket and bayonet. But, though they were comparatively raw troops opposed to war-hardened veterans, nothing could resist the British. The hills were carried along their whole extent, and the French driven back in confusion; but in those thirty minutes of desperate fighting over 500 of the British forces were killed or wounded.

It was a gallant exploit, and Nelson himself—no mean judge of feats of war—wrote of it to Sir Robert Wilson more than a year afterwards, “I have always said, and I do think, that the landing of the British army was the very finest act that even a British army could achieve.” After the landing and the fight Paget writes to his father, “It is impossible for troops to have behaved better—indeed, I did not think it possible for troops to have conducted themselves so well. There was a degree of system and regularity displayed on the 13th far beyond belief, and a cool intrepidity that never was exceeded.” Aboukir Bay, in a word, ought to have, on double grounds, a classic interest for every good Englishman. On that strip of sea and sand the British fleet and the British army, each in turn, performed a deed of memorable skill and daring.

For three days following the landing the weather was stormy, and the business of disembarking stores, &c., difficult; but on March 12 the British troops commenced their advance westward towards

Alexandria. Before them ran a spit of land, some twelve miles long and not more than a mile and a half broad, with the sea to the north and Lake Aboukir to the south. With a front so narrow, rich in capabilities of defence, and strongly held by an enemy of equal strength and burning with military pride, the task of forcing a path to Alexandria was one of great difficulty. The boats of the British men-of-war, however, by this time, found their way into Lake Aboukir, and this was a happy circumstance for the British, as their left flank was thus covered. The British marched in columns, a screen of French horse falling back before them, till, on a range of low heights, barring almost the entire promontory, the French army was discovered.

Abercromby encamped that night within a mile and a half of the enemy, and at six o'clock the following morning attacked fiercely. The French were full of a pride fed by many victories, and were very scornful of British soldiership. They did not wait for the British attack, but, with an impulse of pride, moved down from their strong position to meet it. The French were strong in cavalry, and the 26th Chasseurs-à-cheval rode with great fury on the 90th Light Infantry, under Colonel Hill, which formed the advance-guard of the centre British column. The 90th met the rush of fiery horsemen in line, and, according to the orthodox

traditions of war, ought to have been broken to fragments. Hill's Light Infantry, however, had exactly that same quality of cool and obstinate valour which made Colin Campbell's "thin red line" famous at Balaclava more than fifty years afterwards. The slender extended front of the 90th stood in the track of the galloping horsemen without quailing; the flame and smoke of musketry fire ran along its whole front. The French Chasseurs were gallant men, and they pushed their charge home almost to the very bayonets—some of their number even dying of bayonet wounds—but they could not shake or break the gallant 90th, and had to fall back with heavy loss.

The British pushed steadily on. Abercromby's plan was to turn the enemy's right, and the sharpest fighting naturally fell to Cavan's brigade, with the 92nd Highlanders as its advance-guard, which formed the British left. Some French field-pieces smote the 92nd heavily with grape, while a French regiment of great fame, the 61st demi-brigade, known as "The Invincibles," came forward at the quick-step to meet the 92nd with the bayonet. The Highlanders, however, proved too much for even the "Invincibles," who broke under the actual push of steel, and in their victorious rush the Highlanders captured two field-pieces. Moore, who commanded the British right wing, moved so as to keep in line with the left wing; and the French

right being thus driven back, a retreat began along their whole line until a range of heights, on which some heavy guns were planted, was reached.

Abercromby, after a consultation with Hutchinson, his second in command, resolved to assault the new position. Hutchinson was to lead the three brigades in the second line against the French right; Moore, with the reserve and with the Guards, at the same moment was to attack the French left. Hutchinson, on reaching the point he was to attack, found it was of unexpected strength, and, if carried, could not be held, as it was commanded by fortified heights beyond. He halted, therefore, and sent for new instructions from Abercromby. During that long halt, and while Abercromby reconnoitred, the French were firing heavily, and there was much slaughter. "We had two captains and between thirty and forty rank and file knocked down without firing a shot or hearing a syllable uttered, the regiment standing in open column, with intervals that would have done credit to a Phoenix Park review." This is how Paget describes the part played by his regiment, the 28th, during that fatal pause when the English stood passively to be shot down by the French. "The army," says Sir Robert Wilson, "continued under the most terrible and destructive fire from the enemy's guns to which the troops were ever exposed. The work of death was never more quick, or greater opportunity afforded for destruction. The

French, no longer in danger, had only to load and fire. Aim was unnecessary; the bullets could not but do their office and plunge into the lines. For several hours did the English remain patiently suffering this exterminating fire, and never betrayed the least irresolution. If a word was heard, it contained only a wish to be led on to the assault."

Abercromby finally abandoned his attack, but the British loss for the day was nearly 1300 men, and the greater part of it was incurred during that long and murderous halt within gunshot of the French batteries, while Abercromby and Hutchinson were considering whether they should attack. Both generals, it may be added, were so extremely short-sighted as to be semi-blind, and to that physical defect in their leaders the chief loss of the British was due. The loss of the French was only 700.

Abercromby now resolved to wait till his heavy guns could be landed before attacking Alexandria, while General Menou, with 6000 troops, joined the force defending that city, and announced his intention of driving the British to their ships. A week's pause intervened, each side being busy strengthening its position and preparing for a decisive struggle. Abercromby, however, never a sanguine general, began to take an anxious view of his prospects. He had lost 2000 gallant troops since his landing; the French were enormously superior in artillery and cavalry; there was no hope of Turkish assistance, and

no word of Baird's arrival from India. Abercromby was personally as brave as the Cid, but he was an old man, and he was, unfortunately, only too familiar with expeditions which ended in retreat.

On the night of March 20, in a talk with Moore, the most trusted of his lieutenants, Abercromby explained the decision he had reached. As soon as his heavy guns were up he would make a resolute attack on the French position, and if it failed, they must take to their ships. What Abercromby, gallant soldier as he was, did not quite realise, was the fighting quality of his own troops. Before noon the very next day the great battle was fought, and the French force in Egypt decisively shattered; though as for Abercromby himself, it was to be his last fight.

The British army stretched from the sea to Lake Maadieh, a front of a mile and a half. On the right were some extensive ruins, called by the French *Le Camp des Romains*, overlooking the beach, and somewhat in advance of the British front. These were held by the 58th. A redoubt to the left of the ruins, and open to the rear, was held by the 28th. Next came a shallow valley, some 300 yards broad, in which was placed the British cavalry. Then came a great sandhill, on which stood the Guards, forming the British centre. The left was held by Craddock and Cavan, with part of the latter's brigade thrown back so as to face the shore of Lake Mareotis.

CHAPTER IV

ALEXANDRIA: AND AFTERWARDS

THE night of March 20 passed quietly. Moore, who was general officer for the day, had just given the usual order for the pickets to fall back at daybreak. It was, as afterwards in the Peninsula, a standing order that every regiment should be formed at its post an hour before daybreak, and the lines were silently mustering in the pitch darkness in obedience to that plan, when far to the British left rose the sharp crackle of musketry. Moore was riding off to ascertain its cause, when, deep and sudden, there came the blast of rolling volleys on the extreme British right. Moore's soldierly brain instantly grasped the position. "That is the true attack," he said, and turning round his horse, rode with speed to where, high in the blackness, stood the great ruins held by the 58th and the 28th, all ringed now with darting musketry fire. Menou had taken the initiative and was attacking.

The French plan of attack was conceived with great skill, and carried out with fire and resolution. The forces on both sides were of about

equal strength—about 12,000 fighting men. Menou divided his force into three columns. The left column, under General Lanusse, a daring and energetic soldier, consisted of 3000 picked troops; the centre was led by General Rampon; the right column was under General Regnier. An hour before dawn, while night still lay black and almost starless on the landscape, a body of dragoons and a detachment of the dromedary corps were to make a dash upon a redoubt which formed the extreme left of the British line. The three main columns of attack had meanwhile crept silently, and under cover of the darkness, within striking reach of the British front. Directly the crackle of musketry awoke at the redoubt on the extreme British left, Lanusse was to take his column forward at the run, pierce through the valley to the left of the Roman camp, attack that position both in front and rear, carry it, then sweep sharply round to the rear of the ridge held by the Guards, which formed the British centre. The French attack being delivered *en echelon*—the three columns coming up, that is, not simultaneously, but one after the other—it was calculated that Lanusse would be storming in a tempest of musketry fire past the rear of the position held by the Guards just when Rampon was assailing it in front; and that process would be repeated on the English left as Regnier flung himself on it.

The battle of Alexandria, as Menou planned it, was to be, in a word, the story of the Nile as Nelson fought it, translated into the terms of a land battle. Granted that Lanusse could pierce the British right and swing sharply round to the left, all the remaining positions in the British line would be crushed in succession by an attack on both front and rear, and the entire British army would be whirled, a tumultuous and wrecked mass, into the waters of Lake Maadieh.

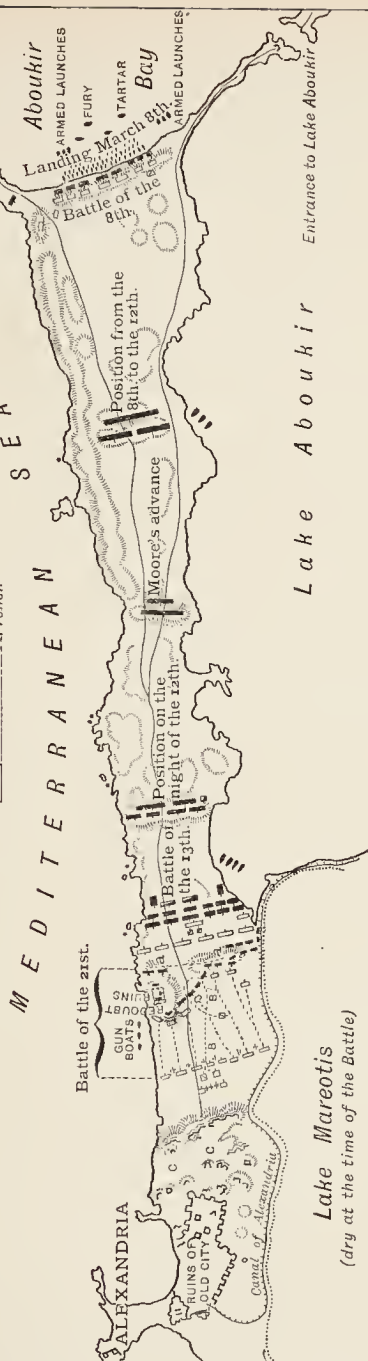
Lanusse, to do him justice, was exactly the man to carry out the first step in such a scheme of battle. He led his column swiftly and with great resolution against the redoubt held by the 28th. The left wing of the 42nd Highlanders, under Major Stirling, was in the open ground to the left of the redoubt, its right wing, under Colonel Stewart, was some 200 yards in the rear. The 28th held the redoubt itself stubbornly, but so black was the darkness — night and mist and smoke together blotting everything out—that as Moore rode up all he could see was the two lines of pointed and darting flames, that now seemed almost to touch and the next moment fell back from each other, while the air was full of the roar of musketry and the sound of the fiercely-beaten French drums. Moore's horse was shot; Paget, who commanded the 28th, fell severely wounded. The volleys of the 58th in the Roman camp, by this time roll-

Operations of the British Army in Egypt, from the landing on March 8th., to the Battle of March 21st. 1801.



Scale of Miles
0 1 2 3 4

British
French



Battle of the 21st. March.

B.B. Charge of the French Cavalry
C.C. Heights of Nicopolis, to which the French retreated
after the Battles of the 13th. and 21st.

Battle of the 13th. March.

a.a. Position of the French Army before the Battle

Walker & Bontall sc.

ing fiercely, deepened the tumult of sound. The French columns had pushed forward with audacious courage. One column, indeed, consisting of what was called "The Invincible Legion"—a title which the fighting of that morning was to irretrievably ruin—was actually marching, unseen, betwixt the two wings of the 42nd to attack the flank of the ruins held by the 58th. The sand made the tread of their feet as they marched soundless; even the trundling of a six-pounder gun they had with them was unheard.

But a quick-eyed private in the right wing of the 42nd caught a glimpse of a mass of black figures defiling, as silently as ghosts, across their front. He eagerly drew his captain's attention to it, and begged that they might charge at once. The officer was incredulous, but running forward a few steps, found that his alert private was correct. Moore himself promptly wheeled round the rear rank of the left wing, and from both faces the 42nd poured their steady volleys into the French, the Highlanders thus being engaged at the same moment on both rear and front. Still pushing recklessly forward, the French column swept past the rear of the redoubt held by the 28th. That gallant regiment was at that moment engaged in repelling a fierce attack on the front of the redoubt, but its rear-rank men, too, promptly swung round and opened fire on the column passing behind them. Two British regiments were thus

engaged at the same moment on two faces. The 58th and the 40th, which held the ruins, met the head of the French column as it approached with a crushing fire, and Moore, who had run to the right wing of the 42nd, wheeled it round, and poured close and deadly volleys on the rear of the French. "The Invincible Legion," in brief, found itself in a death-trap. Smitten with fire on three faces at once, it was simply destroyed. The survivors, reduced to about 200, surrendered, and their standard, inscribed with the names of a score of Italian victories, was yielded to Major Stirling of the 42nd.

Moore was leading back the wing of the 42nd to its position, when up the shallow valley, 300 yards wide, which ran betwixt the British right and centre, was heard the tumult of galloping hoofs. It was the French cavalry, 1000 strong, coming on at full speed. The Highlanders were caught, and in a moment the furiously riding horsemen had swept through them and over them. But a Highland regiment when broken up into units is still a dangerous thing. Each unit becomes a wrathful and desperately fighting man, who persists in thrusting and shooting when, according to the recognised military usage in such a case, he ought to be running away! "Though broken," says Bunbury, "the Highlanders, as they regained their legs, plied their muskets individually, and so coolly that they struck down many men and horses." The High-

landers and the French cavalry were so intermixed that the flank companies of the 40th were, for some minutes, unable to fire on the contending mass. The French horsemen, however, quickly disentangled themselves, and rode fiercely on to the rear of the 28th. That regiment in turn promptly faced round its rear rank and met the torrent of charging cavalry with a fire so steadfast that it swerved, and broke, in a sort of human spray, away to the flank. For that exploit the men of the 28th still wear the number of their regiment on the back as well as the front of their caps. The rush of the desperately charging French horsemen was finally arrested by a brigade which General Stewart brought up from the second line.

The attack on the ruins and the redoubt was still pushed with sullen fury, but on both sides ammunition was failing, and the French and the 28th actually fought with stones when the last bullets in their pouches had been fired. Nor were those primitive weapons harmless, a sergeant of the 28th being killed by a stone thrown from the hand of a furious Frenchman. The grenadiers of the 40th at last leaped out with the bayonet and drove off the stubborn enemy.

The French plan of piercing through the British right had thus failed, and with that failure their whole scheme of battle went to pieces. Rampon, with the central French column, attacked the front of the position held by the Guards in vain; a

second attempt to turn their left flank was defeated with even greater slaughter. The right column of the French, under Regnier, was to advance only when the success of the attack led by Lanusse was assured, and, as it never reached success, Regnier did not move. The battle began at four o'clock, by nine o'clock it was ended.

Menou's plan of attack was able; it was carried into execution with great fire and courage—a courage which was not without a certain flavour of contempt for their enemies on the part of the French. The French were veterans, to whom victory was a habit; they knew the ground; they were splendidly led. And yet they failed! The British line was unpierceable. Some of the British regiments were assailed on three sides at once, yet their formation was never shaken. The Highlanders caught in line by a torrent of galloping horsemen and shattered, yet somehow survived that process, and emerged from the tumult, no doubt, in a high degree of Celtic anger, but with fighting quality undestroyed. These “raw” British troops, in a word, had met the veterans of France in a fair fight and in equal strength, and had beaten them! The moral effect of the battle was immense. It shattered the almost magic charm which seemed to rest on the French standards. It awoke afresh the military spirit of England. It showed that the blood of the men who triumphed at Crecy and at Agincourt flowed still in British veins. That spectacle of the stubborn regi-

ments at Alexandria, fighting with equal coolness on both faces at once, created a new tradition for British soldiers everywhere.

Paget, who commanded the 28th, became its colonel at the tender age of eighteen; he was not twenty-six when he commanded that regiment in the wild night fight at Alexandria. Paget came of a fighting family. His eldest brother commanded Moore's cavalry in their retreat to Corunna, and Wellington's cavalry at Waterloo, and in both offices won fame for himself. Two of Paget's brothers were gallant sailors; yet another was a hard-fighting major of hussars, and Paget himself was very young to command a regiment which, like the 28th at Alexandria, was furiously attacked in the darkness on two fronts at once. But no war-seasoned veteran could have shown greater coolness and resource than this very juvenile colonel. His order—cool, ringing, prompt—“Rear rank 28th. Right about! Fire!”—not merely saved the 28th, it added a new and kindling tradition to British military history. If the 28th still carry, as we have seen, the number of their regiment on the back as well as the front of their head-dress, they owe that unique distinction to the coolness and resource of their youthful colonel at Alexandria.

The losses on both sides were heavy, that of the French being not less than 3000 men, including 900 prisoners, while the British killed and wounded reached nearly 1500. But not the least loss to the British was that of Abercromby himself. Danger

always drew Abercromby like a magnet. Wherever the fight was closest and most bloody, he was sure to be found, blinking with his bat-like shortness of vision on gleaming swords and flashing muskets, with a composed sort of philosophy. All the members of his staff were in a benevolent conspiracy to keep their general out of peril, usually with very imperfect success. In the darkness of that wild struggle at Alexandria, he had ridden to the right of his army, where the fight was fiercest, and when the French cavalry broke through the 42nd Highlanders, Abercromby was caught in the rush of the charging horsemen. Moore had previously caught a glimpse of Abercromby's venerable figure through the gloom, right in the track of the charging cavalry, and by gesture and voice had tried to rescue him, but in vain. In a moment the furious horsemen were round the British general.

One Frenchman, who, from the tassel dangling from his sword-hilt, seemed to be an officer, rode straight at Abercromby with lifted sword, and smote him on the breast. He was so close that the blow was ineffective. Abercromby was weaponless, but as his horse and that of the Frenchman jostled together, he caught his enemy's uplifted wrist and wrested the sword from his grasp, and the next moment a private of the 42nd thrust his bayonet into the Frenchman, who fell, leaving his sword in Abercromby's hand.

The tumult of horsemen in another moment had

swept past in the darkness, and Abereromby rode composedly to the redoubt held by the Guards, dismounted, climbed to one of the guns, whence he could command a view of the field in the now fast-kindling dawn. In answer to some inquiries he complained of the contusion in his breast, but of nothing else, and until ten o'clock was standing or walking about, giving orders to suit the changing fortunes of the fight. Yet for all these hours Abercromby was suffering from a mortal wound! A bullet had pierced his thigh, the ball lodging in the bone so deeply that it could not be extracted. The hardy old general at last confessed to being faint, and sat down on the ground, leaning his back against a parapet of the redoubt. A surgeon was brought to examine his wound; it was determined to carry him to the flagship; he was lifted upon a litter, and some one took a blanket from a soldier, and put it under the general's head as a pillow. "What are you putting under my head?" asked Abercromby, and the reply was, "Only a soldier's blanket." "Only a soldier's blanket!" said the general; "it means a great deal to the soldier. Send me the name of the soldier to whom it belongs, that it may be returned to him." And in the very faintness of his dying hour Abereromby reminded his attendants to send back that soldier's blanket!

Abercromby can hardly be reckoned a great commander, but he was a soldier of a fine type, and one in which the British army is fortunately rich—high-



LORD HUTCHINSON

After an engraving by W. NICHOLLS

minded, loyal, cool, rich in saving common-sense, and with an infinite capacity for taking pains. Abercromby had probably never read Wordsworth, but Wordsworth's noble lines on "duty," that "stern lawgiver," whose countenance yet wears "the godhead's most benignant grace," admirably express the keynote of Abercromby's life. There was not an ignoble fibre in the old Scottish soldier's character. "As he looked out from under his thick shaggy eyebrows," says one who knew him well, "he gave one the idea of a very good-natured lion." There was something lion-like in Abercromby's character, and that it was plentifully flavoured with humanity that story of the soldier's blanket shows.

Abercromby's death was a genuine disaster to the British army. It seemed to be left leaderless. The next in command, General Hutchinson, was almost unknown to the army, and what little was known about him aroused dislike. It would be difficult to imagine a less soldierly figure than that of Abercromby's successor. "Harsh features, jaundiced by ill-health, extreme short-sightedness, a stooping body, a slouching gait, an utterly neglected dress"—this is the portrait of Hutchinson drawn by Bunbury, who served under him. The new commander, too, had other unhappy qualities. He was idle, dreamy, shy, with the clumsy manners that are begotten of shyness, and with the bitter temper bred of a bad digestion. But events were to show that there were at least some of the qualities of a great soldier in

Hutchinson. Abercromby—no mean judge of men—had specially asked that he might be his second in command, and in the campaign which followed Alexandria, and which ended in the entire overthrow of the French, Hutchinson showed a clearness of brain and a capacity for firm resolve which entitled him to high rank as a soldier.

Hutchinson's first step was to isolate Alexandria, and he effected this with great adroitness by cutting the embankment of the canal and letting the sea rush into Lake Mareotis. Four cuts were made in the wall of the canal; and, just as evening fell on April 13, the first ripple of the waters of the Mediterranean ran through one of these cuts into the long dry bed of the ancient lake. There was a fall of six feet from the Mediterranean level to the floor of Lake Mareotis, and a few blows of the pick thus, in effect, created a small sea, with an area of more than 1200 square miles, upon which the British gunboats could sail, and which practically cut off Alexandria with its garrison from the rest of the French forces in Egypt.

Rosetta fell before the British advance, and Hutchinson's gunboats were now able to ascend the Nile. General Eyre Coote, with 6000 troops, was left to blockade Menou in Alexandria, while Hutchinson himself, with less than 5000 men, undertook to fight his way up the Nile to Cairo; his force, though not his fighting strength, being increased by the arrival of 4000 Turkish troops under the com-

mand of the Capitan Pacha. Some 4500 good French troops, under General Legrange, held Rahmanieh, the junction of the Alexandria Canal and the Nile, and it was expected that a point so vital would be held with great stubbornness. But the shadow of the defeat at Alexandria was upon the French, and they fell back almost without resistance before Hutchinson's approach.

But the British force seemed utterly inadequate for the desperate task of marching on Cairo, held by a force more numerous than itself, and which would be enormously strengthened by the troops under Legrange. The season was hot. There was plague in Cairo. The British army had no siege guns. The Turkish army was little better than a camp of nomads, and there was no sign yet of Sir David Baird's appearance from India. But Hutchinson, with high courage, resolved to push on, and his resolve was the signal for what was well-nigh a mutiny in the British camp. Their moody and solitary general was neither loved nor understood by the British officers, and a written plan was submitted to both Moore and Coote in turn for depriving Hutchinson of the command! Both those fine officers were loyal, Hutchinson's strength of will asserted itself, and on May 11 the British columns, in somewhat sulky mood—as far as their officers, at least, were concerned—began their march southward. The very next morning came the news that a single

ship, bringing two companies of the 86th, had arrived at Suez from India, and also that General Belliard, in command at Cairo, was marching out in force to scatter the Turkish auxiliaries.

Hutchinson, however, pushed steadily on, while a fierce sirocco scorched his panting troops as with the blast of a furnace. On the 16th a gleam of good fortune befell the British. The Arab scouts reported that a strong French convoy, with supplies, was marching towards Cairo. It consisted of over 700 camels, guarded by 600 French veterans. General Doyle, with 250 dragoons and some infantry, was at once despatched to attack the convoy, and his dragoons, outriding the infantry, found the convoy massed together in fighting order, and of quite unexpected strength. Doyle hesitated to attack with his cavalry only, and Sir Robert Wilson asked permission to ride up to the French ranks with a flag of truce and demand their surrender. It was a stroke of almost impish audacity, and yet it succeeded! Wilson, with some difficulty, borrowed a reasonably white pocket handkerchief, tied it to his sword blade, and galloped up to the French line. Its commander rode out a few paces to meet him, and Wilson, in a voice loud enough for the French soldiers to hear, demanded the surrender of the detachment on condition of being allowed to return to France. The French commander sternly refused the offer and bade Wilson retire.

Wilson rode slowly away; but his words, "*revenir en France*," had fallen on eager ears and acted like a charm. A tumult arose in the French ranks, and presently a French aide-de-camp was galloping in Wilson's tracks to beg him to return. As a result the whole detachment surrendered. Menou lost nearly 600 of his best troops without a shot being fired! The truth is, the French were tired of Egypt: they were eager to see the shores of *la belle France* again, and on any terms. The combats round Alexandria, too, were both a surprise and a discouragement to them. The French prisoners frankly told their British captors they had never before experienced such hard fighting. They believed the British, moreover, to be stronger than they really were; and if capitulation meant a safe and prompt return to France, then the French felt there was much to be said in favour of that process. And that is a mood—especially in the French character—not favourable to great deeds.

Hutchinson's Turkish auxiliaries had moved considerably ahead of the slow-footed British columns, and on May 15 they were within a day's march of Cairo. General Belliard believed he saw his opportunity, and with 4500 infantry, 1000 cavalry, and 24 guns, he dashed out upon the Turks, resolved to add one more to the shining roll of French victories in Egypt. But the Turks had some British officers with them, and already that curious faculty for

the leadership of men of other races, which all history shows the British possess, had made itself felt. The Turks fought with a spirit and a skill they had never before manifested; and, after a combat of several hours, Belliard fell back, sorely disconcerted, on Cairo—the first time French troops in the open had failed to overthrow Turks. Hutchinson, it is true, had yet some cause for anxiety. He had already sent 1000 of his soldiers down the Nile to the hospitals; there were rumours that Admiral Gantheaume, with a strong squadron, was on his way to the relief of Alexandria; no tidings had come of Baird's arrival. But the British general, with his scanty handful of troops, resolutely set himself to besiege Cairo—he would besiege 13,000 men, that is, with 4000;—a feat of military audacity almost without precedent, and one which marks the new temper which had crept into British soldiership.

But Belliard had no spirit to sustain a siege, and on the morning of June 22 he sent to ask terms. These were quickly settled. The French were to march, under British escort, with all their arms and baggage, to Rosetta, and thence be conveyed, in British transports, to France.

Thus on July 10 there started down the left bank of the Nile the most singular procession, perhaps, ever witnessed. It consisted of 8000 French soldiers, completely equipped, with field-pieces splendidly horsed, and cavalry well mounted, escorted by 3500

British, with some Turkish auxiliaries. A huge flotilla on the Nile itself carried the French sick and women, with civilians and baggage. And for 200 miles that strange procession crept cheerfully along, English and French mingling by each other's camp-fires at night with the utmost good temper. That procession of surrendered French battalions began at Embabah, the very scene of Napoleon's victory of the Pyramids, won only three years before. Napoleon then, it will be remembered, in a memorable speech, invited his soldiers to consider that from the summit of those Pyramids forty centuries contemplated them. And now those same Pyramids looked down on the astonishing spectacle of those identical veterans marching as prisoners of war under an escort of Scotch regiments, whose skirling pipes were pouring out the strains of "Highland Laddie!" Nothing could exceed the meekness with which these war-famous veterans embarked in the English boats to be transported back to France as beaten troops. One boat, flying a black flag, headed the huge convoy. It carried the embalmed body of the assassinated Kleber. On August 7 a squadron of British transports took on board the entire army that had surrendered at Cairo, which, with non-combatants, amounted to 13,672, and sailed with it for French ports.

Under the articles of capitulation at Cairo, General Menou and the French troops in Alexandria were

entitled to the same terms; but Menou, in great wrath, proclaimed that he would hold Alexandria to his very last cartridge; and Hutchinson, now marching down the Nile to rejoin Coote, had the task of the reduction of Alexandria before him. Reinforcements were by this time flowing in to the British. Eight battalions of infantry had arrived from England, and Baird, with 5000 troops from India, had made his appearance on the Upper Nile.

The story of Baird's expedition is itself a romance. His force consisted of the 10th, 80th, 86th, and 88th regiments, with three battalions of volunteer Sepoys, and large drafts of artillery-men. These were to be joined on their passage by the 61st and a troop of the 8th Light Dragoons from the Cape of Good Hope. Wellesley was to have been Baird's second in command, but an attack of intermittent fever prevented him joining the expedition. It is curious to remember that the *Susanna*, the transport in which he was to have sailed, was lost on the voyage. But for that happy touch of fever Wellesley might have found a nameless and wandering grave somewhere in the Indian Ocean; and the greatest of English soldiers would thus have disappeared, with his career unfulfilled, from history! The force was to land at Suez, march across the desert, and join hands with Abercromby before Alexandria. But persistent storms buffeted Baird's lumbering transports. They were scattered; not a few ships



SIR DAVID BAIRD

From an engraving after the drawing by A. J. OLIVER, A.R.A.

gave up the struggle, and turned their stems towards India again. In the reef-sown and almost uncharted waters of the Red Sea the fleet was still more hopelessly broken up, and its admiral reached Suez alone with his flag-ship. His commodore, Sir Home Popham, succeeded in gathering up a cluster of the scattered transports, and with them dropped anchor in the Bay of Cosseir on May 17.

For three weeks the sea-battered transports came straggling in, like broken-winged sea-birds, to Cosseir; and on June 21, Baird, having bought all the camels in his neighbourhood, set out with 5200 men on a march of 130 miles across the almost waterless desert to Keneh. The route lay through a tangle of sandhills, on which the white heat of the sun smote with extraordinary fury. Many horses and camels perished, but only twelve soldiers died of sunstroke; and the sturdy British troops endured the heat better than even the bronze-tinted Sepoys. Baird reached Keneh early in July, and brought his troops down in successive detachments to Cairo, and thence to Alexandria.

It is unnecessary to linger over the details of the siege of Alexandria. Menou held the city with great resolution, while Hutchinson attacked with admirable skill. On August 30 the French general surrendered on the same terms as those accorded to Belliard at Cairo.

It is said that Bonaparte received the news of the defeat of the French at Alexandria with a degree of anguish almost equal to that which the thunderclap of Trafalgar, four years afterwards, inflicted on him. "Junot," he said to his favourite aide-de-camp, while his features worked with emotion, "we have lost Egypt!" Junot himself, according to the memoirs left by his wife, wept like a child when afterwards telling the story of his chief's distress on learning of Abercromby's victory. "My projects and my dreams alike have been destroyed by England," he said. And Egypt represented to Bonaparte both a "project" and a "dream" of very amazing quality. "Napoleon's design," says Junot, "was to have made Egypt the point from which the thunderbolt was to issue which was to overwhelm the British Empire."

Bonaparte, as a matter of fact, had made the most energetic efforts to send reinforcements to Egypt. When, as First Consul, he had made peace with Austria, well-nigh every port in France was filled with the hum of busy preparations for the despatch of a new expedition to the East. Gantheaume, with a squadron of six sail of the line and two frigates, all picked ships, and carrying nearly 4000 soldiers, ran out of Brest in a heavy gale of wind towards the end of January 1801; but the sight of a squadron of only four sail of the line, under Sir John Warren, drove the French admiral into Toulon. On March 22, Gantheaume stole out of Toulon, but ill-fate still

pursued him. Off Sardinia two of his largest ships ran into each other, and once more the squadron returned to Toulon. On April 5 he was again at sea, but fever broke out in his ships, and he had to send three of his squadron back. He actually reached the coast of Egypt, but while hesitating whether to attempt a landing, some British topsails showed above the horizon, and Gantheaume instantly spread sail for the shelter of Toulon.

Bonaparte, in a word, found the task of reinforcing the French garrison in Egypt impossible, yet the news of the complete success of the British moved him to violent anger. No less than 24,000 French veterans, with 312 guns, had surrendered to British forces greatly inferior to themselves in number.

The effects of the success of the British campaign were very great. For well-nigh a generation—from the surrenders of Saratoga and York Town to the inglorious campaigns in Holland—the performances of the British army had been without a single gleam of success. But the Egyptian campaign proved that British soldiers could meet the conquerors of Italy and Germany in battle on equal terms and overthrow them. The menace to India had vanished. The dream of a French Empire in the East disappeared like a nightmare!

CHAPTER V

NAPOLEON AND ENGLAND

THE Egyptian expedition was the first great incident in that long duel betwixt Napoleon and England which, for the next seventeen years, was, in a sense, to constitute the history of Europe. For scale, for duration, for its dramatic incidents and close, and for its influence on history, that struggle has no parallel since the historic contest betwixt Hannibal and Rome.

When Bonaparte returned from Egypt the Revolution had exhausted itself. The flame of its passions had sunk to mere ashes. Perhaps it was not in human nature—it certainly was not in French human nature—to maintain, through so many years, for even the most admirable political theories, that white heat of zeal which the Revolution had kindled. In the earlier years of the Revolution the wars of France had been a crusade for great principles. The first soldiers of the Republic were the missionaries of a new political gospel. But that mood had passed. The France of 1801 was a nation fighting for power, for territory, for glory, but not for principles. All the political machinery of the Revolution had disappeared

like dreams. "Assemblies," "Conventions," "Committees of Public Safety," "Directories"—these had arisen like shadows, and they vanished like shadows. There remained the single figure of Bonaparte. Professor Sloane describes Bonaparte as "the embodiment of the Revolution;" but no phrase could well be less accurate. He was, in a sense, not even its product. Only in a partial sense can he be described as its political heir. His "inheritance," at least, did not include the political theories of the Revolution.

His triumph, as a matter of fact, was not a victory for any political theory, shining or sordid. France fell into his hands like some great derelict ship, its canvas torn, its stately masts splintered, its rich cargo half plundered. Bonaparte triumphed over all competitors—over Barras and Sieyès, over Hoche and Joubert and Moreau—because he had a sharper sword, a more subtle brain, or a happier fortune than these; not in the least because he represented a superior political theory. He was by nature a great soldier, with his own sword for conscience and principles. His genius for government made disorder hateful to him; his soldierly instinct made him the stern enemy of mere talkers and demagogues. "If I have the happiness to reach France," he said to Menou when leaving Egypt, "the reign of ranting shall be at an end." But of politics, in any large and reasoned sense, Bonaparte was utterly careless.

It is true that with the Eagles of the Empire,

as with the Tricolour of the Republic, there went everywhere certain principles, which may be described as the commonplaces—not to say the platitudes—of the Revolution: the abolition of feudal usages, the breaking down of social caste, the secularisation of society, &c. But the Empire substituted one huge despotism for many petty ones. What were the three watchwords of 1789—liberty, fraternity, equality—to Napoleon? They were merely glittering phrases, useful in tricking the crowd, but without meaning in his own ears. In his brain there burned the flame of an ambition as unashamedly selfish as any that ever cursed the world. When he grasped the Consulate he became a ruler as absolute as Louis XI., and he used the resources of France for wars of aggrandisement on a scale which would have moved the envious wonder of Louis XIV. The “Family Compact” of the Bourbons is a phrase of evil significance in European history; but what Bourbon ever planned for his House such a concentration of royalties as that which Napoleon actually accomplished for his own brothers and sisters? France, Spain, Holland, Westphalia, Naples — each had to furnish a crown for the head of a Bonaparte!

The struggle betwixt England and the Revolution was inevitable. The instinct of order was supreme in one nation, the passion for change in the other; and the Revolutionary watchword of “War to all governments, peace to all peoples,” meant strife on

every frontier. But Bonaparte's long duel with England was, in a sense, an accident. He had no ancestral hate against Great Britain. He was not, like Hannibal, consecrated from his very infancy to some great campaign of revenge. No ineffaceable discord of political principles separated him from England. Bonaparte was not the missionary of any political gospel of which England was the persecutor, nor was the First Consul pledged by patriotic zeal to undying war with Great Britain. He was himself a man of no country. Italy gave him his subtle brain and ruthless conscience; he owed to Corsica his soldierly blood. But France had no part in him. He once, as a youth, contemplated taking service under the British flag; it is possible to describe him as, by legal fiction, a British subject during those three years when George III. was king of Corsica; and after Waterloo he demanded with clamour, as his final aspiration, that he might be allowed to spend his patriarchal old age as a British citizen. Bonaparte, in brief, neither by race, nor by personal sentiment, nor by political principles, was pledged to a truceless and mortal duel with Great Britain. It is true that his first battle was fought at Toulon against English troops, and the first wound he ever received was from an English bayonet; but this was an accident.

The Egyptian campaign may be described in like manner as an accident. Bonaparte in 1798, after

the glory of his Italian campaigns, was really aiming at supreme power in France. He tried, and tried in vain, to have the law which fixed the age of a member of the Directory altered in his favour. But, to use his own expressive phrase, "the pear was not ripe." If he lingered in Paris, as he himself said, he ran the risk of being forgotten. So he turned to the East. He would go there, do great things, and return clothed with new and yet more glittering fame. It was at least an adventure with a dazzling nimbus of romance about it. The possibility of dealing a sudden and startling stroke against the British power in India was, no doubt, an element in the case; and Bonaparte—an adept in the art of concealing his selfish ambitions under shining phrases—talked much of "overthrowing England" by victories won in strange and far-off realms. But the expedition to Egypt was for him chiefly an adventure which filled up the tedious interval which must elapse before "the pear was ripe" and the supreme power in France could be seized. "To render him master of France," says Montholon—giving Napoleon's own explanation of the situation long afterwards—"it was necessary that the Directory should experience disasters in his absence, and that his return should recall victory to the colours of the nation." "After all," said Bonaparte to Junot before they sailed, "we are only twenty-nine."

It is clear, too, that at this stage Napoleon had no

real vision of what the sea-power of England meant, and what limits it imposed on his ambition. It was the courage bred of imperfect knowledge which made him risk his fortunes, and the fate of his army, in Brueys' ships, with Nelson in pursuit. Brueys was seaman enough to understand that risk, and all through the voyage to Egypt he was in a mood of restless alarm. Bonaparte could not understand his admiral's disquiet. He ridiculed it. He thought that the presence of 30,000 good troops in the fleet made it safe, and could not realise the sheep-like helplessness of even the bravest troops when shut down beneath the hatches of a hundred transports. His ignorance on this subject would have experienced a very startling enlightenment on that historic night of June 26, when the two fleets unknowingly crossed each other's tracks, if Nelson's look-outs had caught a glimpse of the French sails!

But in Egypt Bonaparte learned his lesson. The thunders of Nelson's guns at the Nile taught him what sea-power meant. The destruction of Brueys' fleet left the French army prisoners in the very land to which they had come with dreams of conquest. "If it had not been for you English," he said to Maitland on the *Bellerophon* long afterwards, "I should have been Emperor of the East. But wherever there is water to float a ship we are sure to find you in our way!"

Egypt was the first great failure of Bonaparte's public career, the first shadow on the shining disc of

his fame; and it was the naval power of Great Britain which wrought that failure and flung that shadow. Nelson at Aboukir Bay and Sidney Smith at Acre, in Bonaparte's own words, "spoiled his destiny." Bonaparte left Egypt as a deserter and returned to France as a fugitive. No contrast can be more dramatic than that betwixt his start for Egypt and his return from it. Instead of Brueys' stately fleet with its 30,000 gallant troops, with all the beckoning romance of the East before it, we have the spectacle of a couple of hunted frigates creeping along the coast of Africa, shunning all familiar routes, stealing through the narrow seas with hidden lights, and changing their course at the gleam of every distant sail. When Bonaparte actually reached the coast of France an English squadron hove in sight, and for some hours under the terror of that spectacle Bonaparte, as we have seen, contemplated getting into a boat and pulling for the nearest French beach by way of escape. What irony known to history could be keener than this spectacle of the greatest soldier of his age, who left France with a fleet and an army, returning in a dinghy?

It is unnecessary to describe here the plots, the distractions, the wild fears, the lunatic hopes of those three weeks betwixt the arrival of Bonaparte in Paris on October 16, 1799, and the downfall of the Directory on November 9. Bonaparte was the figure round which eddied all the passions and schemes

of that agitated hour. He listened to everybody, trusted nobody, made each party in turn his tool, and triumphed over them all. He has himself described his tactics at this time. "After the return from Egypt," he says, "I listened to advice from everybody, but I only gave it in the interest of my own plans. . . . Every one was taken in my toils, and when I became the head of the State, there was not a party in France which did not build some special hope upon my success."

On December 13 Bonaparte became First Consul; there were two other Consuls, but they were, of course, but a pair of useful masks for Bonaparte himself. The whole Consulate, indeed, and the constitution of which it was the apex, were but the screen for a despotism almost Russian in its completeness, and Chinese in its effacement of individuality. "Who looks at France, under either the Consulate or the Empire," says Lanfrey, "sees only Napoleon." It is a waste of ink to describe a mask, even though it wears the sounding title of a "constitution." Lanfrey describes the Legislative body under the Consulate as "an assembly of mutes, called upon to vote laws in silence which others had discussed." The tribunes, he says, were a "sort of legislative eunuchs, who had the right of discussing without voting." "Every member of the Council of State," he adds, "had either been his (Bonaparte's) accomplice, his creature, or his debtor. All depended on him; all trembled before him."

Mr. Gladstone once described newspapers as the watch-dogs of civilisation; but Napoleon had no use for "watch-dogs." By a Consular decree, dated January 17, 1800, he suppressed all political journals in France, save thirteen whose opinions were of a "satisfactory" colour. Bonaparte himself was accustomed to apply the sternest military treatment to injudicious French editors. He snuffed them out of literary existence on any excuse, or on no excuse at all. He had already whittled down the press of Paris to twelve journals, and these he still further reduced by new edicts to eight, with a total aggregate circulation of 18,630. Paris, in fact, had ceased to enjoy a press, and the eight journals that still survived were accustomed to receive orders as though they were so many French privates under drill. A Paris newspaper any fine day might receive a brief injunction to "change its editor," and must do so before its next issue appeared.

Many amusing examples of how Napoleon drilled French editors might be given. Thus on April 25, 1808, Napoleon writes to Fouché: "The *Journal de l'Empire* still goes on badly. What business had the editor to insert Mr. Canning's speech in the Copenhagen intelligence? Ought he to have inserted it without knowing that it suited me? That young man is either an ill-disposed person or a fool. Tell him so from me! If he does not change his ways, I shall change the editor. . . . Have all the old editors

who were so hot against the present Administration turned away. I had also forbidden the newspapers to refer to priests, sermons, or religion. Does not the *Journal des Débats* give extracts from sermons, homilies, and other things of that kind? Will the police be good enough to do my will at last?"

On July 24, 1809, he writes: "The newspapers are extremely badly edited. . . . Give positive orders that no gazette is to make any mention of the Pope. Who is the editor of the *Gazette de France*? Pray direct the newspapers better. . . . Give orders on receiving this letter to have the editor of the *Gazette de France* arrested. Keep the editor in prison for a month, and appoint some one else in his place."

Bonaparte's idea of the "freedom of the press" is delightfully represented by a regulation which he instructed his Minister of Police to issue. "Journalists," it ran, "are free to repeat the news published by the official paper," but they must make no private excursions into the realm of history. An event was to be treated as non-existent until it appeared in the *Moniteur*. "I made the *Moniteur*," he said at St. Helena, "the soul and life-blood of my Government;" and the *Moniteur*, it may be added, was perpetually chanting a hymn of praise to the First Consul, varied by a litany of eurses and slanders on all his enemies, and chiefly of course on England and on Englishmen.

Though Napoleon harried the press, he also used

it. His correspondence with his Ministers overflows with instructions as to how the press was to be employed as a funnel for pouring into the mind of France "correct" views and highly incorrect facts. Thus, on April 21, 1807, he writes to Fouché, his Minister of Police: "You must have a great fuss made—especially in the departmental newspapers in Brittany, the Vendée, and Belgium—over the persecution of the Irish Catholics by the Anglican Church. . . . Paint the persecution in the most vivid colours. . . . Make secret arrangements with certain bishops, so that when the articles have produced an impression, prayers may be offered for the cessation of the persecution of the Irish Catholics by the Anglican Church." "You must always say 'Anglican Church' instead of 'Protestant,'" Napoleon explained; "for we have Protestants in France, and we have no Anglican Church. Make use of the newspapers," he adds, "very delicately, and without allowing any suspicion to get about."

Napoleon regulated his clergy, as he did his editors, with military rigour. He writes to Fouché on August 10, 1809: "I send you the Bishop of Namur's charge, which seems to me written with an evil intention. Find out who drew it up." Cardinal Fesch, his uncle, having directed the *Te Deum* to be sung in the churches for the victory of Wagram without Napoleon's letter being read before that performance, Napoleon instructs Fouché

to tell the Cardinal that "unless he directed his clergy to read his letter before the *Te Deum*, I shall consider him my enemy, and the enemy of the State." "I am as much of a theologian," Napoleon adds, "as they are, and even more."

The net result of all this was that Bonaparte gathered into his single palm all the resources and life of France, and he was able to employ a great, proud, and gallant nation in the service of his ambition, as a perfect swordsman uses his weapon. And it is a curious circumstance that Bonaparte's assumption of despotic power neither startled the conscience nor stung the pride of France. A nation which had seen the guillotine busy and called it "liberty," which had witnessed the September massacres perpetrated as a tribute to "fraternity," had naturally a somewhat defective moral vision. It may be said, indeed, to have killed its own sense of humour. It was capable of regarding the military rule which turned France into a camp of soldiers, and with no more freedom than a sergeant's baton permits, as the very apotheosis of "liberty!" "Ten years after publishing its declaration of the rights of man," says Mr. Bordley, "France handed them all over to the soldier whom it made emperor, and whose consistent policy was a complete negation of each article of the famous document." And France, it may be added, was unconscious of the absurdity of the transaction!

CHAPTER VI

THE POLICY OF THE CONSULATE

BONAPARTE was now supreme in France, but some great military triumph was necessary to consecrate the new system. Yet the First Consul wanted to have the advantages of war without the guilt of appearing to provoke it. He appealed to the Powers for peace. France must at least be made to believe that its new head was not consumed by a passion for new wars. The Czar of Russia, the half-mad Paul, was ready, with characteristic fickleness, to abandon both his allies and his quarrel with the Republic. He was persuaded that the Russian troops in their campaign in Holland under the Duke of York had been sacrificed. Great Britain, too, had refused to surrender Malta, of whose knights Paul desired to be Grand Master. The Austrians had failed, the Czar believed, in loyalty to Suwarroff. Paul I., in a mood of wrath, withdrew from the coalition in December 1799, and Bonaparte's flattering attentions completely won the half-lunatic and wholly savage mind of the Czar.

There remained Austria and England. Austria,



B O N A P A R T E

NAPOLEON BONAPARTE

WHEN FIRST CONSUL

From an engraving published in 1801, after a drawing by HILAIRE LE DRU

spoon-fed with English gold, could make no peace without her ally. To Bonaparte's letter proposing negotiations for peace, Lord Grenville replied that England was eager for peace, but the best pledge of the sincerity of a desire for peace on the part of France would be the restoration of its ancient royal House. This was a very unhappy suggestion, as it linked the interests of Great Britain to those of the Bourbons, and, in substance, denied to France the right England herself had exercised, of changing its dynasty. The real ground for rejecting the French proposals was a distrust of the sincerity of Bonaparte, a distrust amply justified by history. Tiernay was able in the House of Commons to ask the Ministry, "What would you say if General Bonaparte, when victorious, should declare he would not treat except with the Stuarts?" Pitt's speech in the debate on the French proposals was of overwhelming force. "Both Revolutionary France and Bonaparte must," he said, "be judged by their history." Peace with them was impossible. France under its new head was a menace to the civilised world. England alone had been able to resist the Revolution; it was the instrument which, later, would save the world. Bonaparte was absolutely untrustworthy; peace with him would only be a false and beguiling truce. Oratory in the House of Commons of that day naturally betook itself to a classic tongue for its perorations, and Pitt ended his great speech by

borrowing a sentence from Cicero: "Cur igitur paccin nolo?—quia infida est, quia periculosa, quia esse non potest."

Pitt's logic was flawless, his rhetoric overwhelming; but he failed to see that the most embarrassing answer he could have made to Bonaparte's advances would have been to accept them. When his histrionic overtures for peace had been rejected, then, says Professor Seeley, "Bonaparte had the satisfaction of getting precisely what he wanted—viz., war—in precisely the way he wished—that is, as apparently forced upon him."

In a very brief space of time, however, Austria was compelled to accept peace in order to escape destruction. It was understood that when Bonaparte became First Consul he ceased to be a soldier. Bonaparte himself affected to regard his military career as closed. "I would willingly," he wrote to Moreau, "barter my Consular purple for the epaulette of a brigadier under you." For the First Consul to be at the head of an army, Bonaparte himself declared, would be "unconstitutional." Moreau, for his part, said bluntly, "I have no notion of seeing a little Louis XIV. at the head of my army. If the First Consul takes the command, I will send in my resignation."

Moreau commanded on the Rhine, Massena in Italy, and Bonaparte could supersede neither. Yet to allow either to outrun him in the path of military

glory was impossible to Bonaparte's jealous nature; and he knew that a too victorious general would overshadow him in 1800, as he, with the glories of his Italian victories, had overshadowed the Directorate in 1797. A third army was prepared, whose commander was "to be named by the Consulate." Bonaparte framed the general plan of French operations so that neither Moreau on the Rhine nor Massena in Italy should do more than amuse the enemy. On May 9 he himself took command of the third army at Geneva; on May 11 he moved forward to cross the Alps, leading his army through the frozen defiles and along the snow-covered slopes of the great St. Bernard. In five days the Alps were passed. Bonaparte left Massena, now besieged in Genoa and reduced to the sorest straits, to his fate. He was aiming, not to save a garrison, but to overthrow an empire. On June 2 Bonaparte entered Milan; on the 14th the great battle of Marengo was fought. At three o'clock on that day the French were practically defeated. The French army, broken into two fragments, was being driven on diverging lines of retreat, and Melas, an old man, exhausted with the strain of the battle, had ridden back to Alessandria to rest himself and send off couriers with the news of his victory, leaving his second in command to pursue the French. But Desaix, meanwhile, brought up the French reserves and arrested the advance of the victorious Austrians.

He himself fell in the desperate struggle, but a charge of the French cavalry under Kellermann finally broke the Austrians, and what was a defeat at three o'clock was an overwhelming victory by 7 P.M.

The battle of Marengo does not add to Bonaparte's fame as a general. He wrote three successive bulletins, each one different from its predecessor, to explain the battle, and, in order to save his bulletins from inconvenient contradictions, had all the original reports of the battle destroyed. But though Marengo did not add to Bonaparte's glory as a soldier, it enormously strengthened his position as First Consul. Melas was still equal in strength to the French; and, says Marmont, "had he fought another battle he would certainly have beaten us." But the Austrian general's imagination was cowed under the spell of his great opponent's genius and fortune, and with ignoble facility he signed a convention by which Northern Italy was surrendered to France. On December 3 Moreau won at Hohenlinden a yet more decisive victory—a victory not quite so famous, perhaps, as that of Marengo, but one quite as history-making in its character; and the Emperor of Austria, to save Vienna from capture, proposed terms of peace.

On February 9, 1801, the Treaty of Luneville was signed. The Rhine was fixed as the frontier of France, and the Austrian possessions in Italy shrank to the limits of the Adige. The Treaty of Luneville

gave peace to the Continent, but left England without an ally, while France became practically the mistress of Europe. A new Europe, in brief, had come into existence, and a new France. The France of Mirabeau, of Danton, of Robespierre had vanished. Instead there had arisen the France of Napoleon, a great military and conquering Power, with one of the greatest soldiers of all time at its head. The Peace of Luneville, says Green, in his "History of the English People," "marks the close of the earlier revolutionary struggle for supremacy in Europe, the abandonment by France of her effort to 'liberate the peoples,' to force new institutions on the nations about her by sheer dint of arms." But it also marked the concentration of all her energies on a struggle with Britain for the supremacy of the world.

In the very moment of his triumph over the Continent, Bonaparte felt the prick of England's sea-power, for Egypt was lost, and the last fragments of the great army that followed him to Egypt were returning to France in British transports, with the shame of defeat and of capitulation upon them. At this stage of his career, then, Bonaparte first realised that while Great Britain remained unsubdued his dream of a world-empire was impossible. Bonaparte and England, in a word, divided the world betwixt them. He was supreme on the land, but where the sea-tides ran his empire ended;

and while these stubborn islanders kept the empire of the sea Bonaparte's ambition was cheated of its prize.

His personal failure in Egypt, no doubt, added an element of passion to Bonaparte's feud with England; but the one enduring cause of quarrel was the fact that Great Britain barred his path to universal empire. And all the resources of his mighty genius were henceforward bent to the removal of that obstacle. All other successes were valued only as they contributed to this last and ultimate triumph. Austerlitz and Jena, in a sense, were *obiter facta*. Napoleon was aiming at England when, in after years, he was invading Spain and Russia. Madrid and Moscow were only stages in his march to London.

The Peace of Luneville practically cleared the stage of other combatants, and left France and Great Britain confronting each other. The story of the war from this stage is, in effect, the story of a struggle betwixt these two great and rival forms of warlike power. France had many advantages. Bonaparte himself summed up one aspect of the relative strength of the two contending nations by saying, "In the long run 15,000,000 must yield to 40,000,000." But the resources at the command of Bonaparte were by no means limited to the population of France itself. He was able to feed his treasury with the wealth of subjugated or

tributary Europe, and to swell his battalions with troops almost as diverse in speech and blood and type as the many-tongued hosts of Xerxes. In France itself almost every other vocation known to civilised life was abandoned for the business of war, and resources so vast were under the control of the will and brain of one of the most subtle intellects ever devoted to the business of governing men.

Great Britain, in some respects, had gained much by the war. Its rivals had been swept from the seas. The colonies of its enemies had fallen, one by one, into its hands. There had been an enormous expansion in the industrial energy and wealth of the three kingdoms. The Act of Union betwixt Great Britain and Ireland had been passed, and though this great measure was carried by very doubtful arts, and by no means brought to a close the age-long discords which embittered the relations of the two countries, it had certainly added to the strength of the United Kingdom. Ireland with an independent Parliament, and united to Great Britain only by the golden but brittle link of the crown, was a constant source of peril. It disordered the policy and divided the strength of the nation. On the other hand, there was much private discontent and suffering in Great Britain. A long succession of bad harvests and an evil fiscal system had sent up the price of corn to famine prices. The financial burden of the war was tre-

mendous. Thus, while the ordinary revenue for 1799 was little over £6,000,000, the estimated expenditure was £29,000,000. George III. was trembling on the verge of lunacy. His son, who must become Regent in that case, had neither sense, morals, nor decency.

At this stage, too, Pitt, "the pilot that weathered the storm," and who, with all his limitations, was the greatest English statesman of his time, fell from power. The diseased sensitiveness of what the semi-lunatic king called his "conscience" on the subject of Catholic emancipation drove Pitt from office. Green, always anxious to reach and interpret the forces which lie behind the facts of history, argues that there was some fitness in the resignation of Pitt at this stage of the conflict. Pitt was a Liberal statesman by sympathy and bent of genius; the force of circumstances had made him a Tory. There were many elements in the Revolution with which British opinion, and Pitt, as its representative, sympathised. When the Revolution, however, menaced the very fabric of society, and flung itself in a furious crusade on all civilised Governments, then Great Britain set itself sternly to the business of resisting, at any cost of treasure and blood, a force so evil. All questions of merely domestic politics were postponed to that task. Pitt represented exactly that complex mental attitude towards Revolutionary France: a sympathy with what was noble in it, a spirit of dogged resist-



HENRY ADDINGTON, VISCOUNT SIDMOUTH

From the picture by COPLEY

ance towards what was aggressive and evil, and a willingness to suspend all domestic legislation to the single business of opposing it.

But a new condition of things had arisen. "The Revolution," said Bonaparte himself when he became First Consul, "is ended." What was threatening the peace of Europe in general, and the existence of Great Britain in particular, was a military despotism as fatal to liberty within its own bounds as it was hostile to peace everywhere else. So a new policy in England was possible. France must still be resisted, but there need be no truce in domestic politics, and no suspension of domestic reforms to enable that resistance to be maintained. It was the sign of a return to ordinary political life that Pitt proposed a measure bearing so strictly a party aspect as Catholic emancipation. It is certain that, at this stage, party divisions in the British Parliament—which, under the stress of the life-and-death struggle with France, had become almost effaced—revived, and it was a purely Tory Cabinet which, for the next few years, governed Great Britain. But the change that put Addington at the helm of affairs instead of Pitt was a sore loss to Great Britain.

Napoleon's efforts to overthrow the sea-power of England may be roughly grouped under four heads: (1) He made use of his influence over the Czar to combine the Northern Powers into a League of Armed Neutrality. This scheme was shattered by

Nelson at Copenhagen. (2) Then followed the truce of Amiens. When that brief truce ended and war broke out afresh, Napoleon organised a great scheme for the direct invasion of England, encamped 160,000 veteran soldiers on the hills above Boulogne, and organised and constructed a vast flotilla for their transport across the Straits. Nelson's stern and tireless blockade of the flotilla defeated this plan. (3) By a combination of the French and Spanish fleets Napoleon hoped to secure, in his own words, "six hours' command of the Channel," in order to land his troops on English soil. Trafalgar, and the iron blockades that preceded Trafalgar, shattered that hope. (4) As Napoleon could not reach England by direct invasion, or meet her fleets in the shock of battle, he struck at her commerce by the famous Berlin and Milan decrees. And his plan of uniting all civilised nations in a league of exclusion against Great Britain led him to those schemes of invasion and conquest—in Spain and in Russia—which ended in his own irreparable overthrow.

CHAPTER VII

THE LEAGUE OF THE NORTHERN POWERS

WHEN Bonaparte, as First Consul, gazed at the European landscape in search of a possible naval combination against Great Britain, he found only one within his reach. Under the Directory, the fleets of France and Holland and Spain had contended in vain against the fleets of England. The navies of these three Powers had disappeared from the open sea; what ships were yet left to them were sealed up in a dozen scattered ports by the tireless British blockades. But there remained the Northern Powers. Russia, Denmark, and Sweden combined could put into battle-line, at once, a great fleet of over forty ships, while a second fleet of almost equal strength could be quickly made effective. The seamen of these fleets were hardy and brave. They, like the English themselves, were of the Viking strain; and it seemed to Bonaparte that, with their help, France might win in the Baltic what she had lost in the Mediterranean.

The Northern Powers had an undoubted grievance against Great Britain. They claimed that the neutral

flag should cover the cargo, except in the case of goods contraband of war; they denied the right of search in the case of neutral ships under convoy. It is, of course, the interest of belligerents to restrict commerce, and of neutrals to expand it, and so a conflict of interests naturally arises. Most of the carrying trade of the world, moreover, was at this moment in British hands, and the neutral Powers were envious of her prosperity. A mere dispute, however, as to the rights of neutrals would not, of itself, have supplied the motive for a league which was to combine the Baltic navies against the fleets of Great Britain, and shut Northern Europe against British trade. Bonaparte reckoned upon the caprice or the passions of the Czar to effect this.

Marengo had filled the half-lunatic head of Paul with a childish admiration of Bonaparte; his vanity was flattered by the adroit attentions of the First Consul, and, with a touch of real genius, Bonaparte turned the very loss of Malta into a device for creating a new coalition against Great Britain. When Malta was at the very point of surrender to the British fleet, Bonaparte wrote to the Czar that, "desiring to give a proof of personal consideration for the Emperor of Russia," he would surrender Malta to him, and desired to know what measures the Czar would take to put Russian troops in possession of this stronghold of the Mediterranean. He would thus hand over not only Malta, but the quarrel about Malta, to the Czar!

But Great Britain could not possibly consent to forego its own victory, now near and certain, and put Malta into what would almost certainly prove to be hostile hands, and she refused to lend herself to this plan. The Czar, in a fit of wrath, ordered all British ships in Russian ports to be seized and their crews made prisoners. This was on December 16, 1800. Russia and Sweden at once signed a treaty of armed neutrality, while Denmark and Prussia promptly added themselves to the League, Prussia marching troops into Hanover.

The treaty which bound the new League together asserted the rights of neutrals to carry on the coasting and colonial trade of nations at war. The flag, it was claimed, covered the cargo; "free bottoms made free goods," and the flag of a neutral convoy protected the ships under convoy from search. Under this latter rule an armed cutter, flying the flag of the tiniest of neutral states, could majestically convoy an entire fleet of an enemy's merchantmen unharmed from port to port! Blockades, the Northern Powers claimed, must be sustained by adequate naval force to be respected; naval stores were not contraband of war. Or rather, the list of contraband articles under the treaty included all military stores which France could produce herself, and whose prohibition would, therefore, mean no loss to her. But warlike stores which France could not produce, such as masts, cordage, hemp, &c., were announced to be non-contraband.

band. The treaty, in short, asserted the right of a neutral nation to carry on, under the shelter of its flag, the trade of a nation at war, whose fleets had been destroyed by its opponent. This was to take from Great Britain every advantage she derived from her superiority on the sea. The claims thus advanced challenged the whole naval policy of Great Britain.

It was winter-time when the League took shape, and the frozen seas and fierce weather of the North made any combination of the fleets belonging to the League for the moment impossible ; but with summer it was certain that the Baltic navies would assemble and threaten England with a force never yet arrayed against her. And behind the League of armed neutrality was the sleepless hostility of France, the brooding, restless intellect of Napoleon Bonaparte !

In this crisis the British Cabinet acted with a decision and energy worthy of Bonaparte himself. The Northern fleets must be struck, and crushed in detail, before any combination of them was possible. War was not yet declared ; but when the fate of a nation is at stake, etiquette is thrust aside. On March 12 a fleet of eighteen ships of the line, with frigates, bomb-vessels, &c., set sail for the Baltic, under the flag of Sir Hyde Parker, with Nelson as second in command. There was no formal proclamation of hostilities. The fleet was intended to "negotiate" with Denmark for her withdrawal from the League ; but when eighteen line-of-battle ships are introduced into



SIR HYDE PARKER

From a mezzotint after the painting by GEORGE ROMNEY

the scene as "negotiators," there can be no doubt as to the nature of the proceedings which are to follow.

Nelson had offended the official mind by his occasional excursions into the realm of independent action, and by the scandal which associated his name with that of Lady Hamilton. But in an expedition in which time was a golden element, which needed fire, decision, leadership in the highest degree, Nelson was the inevitable chief. He was the one seaman who, in swiftness of vision, energy of will, and magnetic influence over the forces under his command, approached what Bonaparte himself was as a soldier. Sir Hyde Parker was a bit of decorous, unenterprising commonplace. He was, in addition, an old man who had just married a young wife, and he regarded his too brilliant and somewhat uncertain second-in-command with the uncomprehending jealousy which a cart-horse might be imagined to feel against a racer. When Nelson joined the fleet at Yarmouth, he found Parker "a little nervous about dark nights and fields of ice." "But," said Nelson, "we must brace up; these are not times for being nervous."

It is an illustration of Parker's inertness, his failure to comprehend the need of swift and resolute action if the Baltic campaign was to succeed, that he actually arranged to postpone sailing in order to give a ball at Yarmouth! Nelson spoiled that folly by private representations to the Admiralty. The

great English seaman had as keen a sense as Napoleon himself of the value of speed in warfare. "Time," he was accustomed to say, "is everything. Five minutes make the difference between a victory and a defeat!"

Nelson had for his flagship the *St. George*, of 98 guns. He was apt to regard whatever ship he happened for the moment to command as being the best ship then afloat, but his disgust with the *St. George* was of a loud-spoken kind. "You cannot think," he wrote, "how dirty the *St. George* is. . . . The ship is not fitted for a flag. Her decks are leaky, and she is truly uncomfortable. But it suits exactly my present feelings." The truth is, Nelson was ill. His sight was failing. He did not yet feel the inspiration of approaching battle. It was a wrench to part with the woman he loved. Nelson felt keenly, too, his treatment by Parker, who kept his dangerous second at arm's length, told him as little as he could, and met him as seldom as possible. Nelson, indeed, four days after he hoisted his flag, was left to learn from the newspapers the exact destination of the fleet. Parker told him nothing.

Perhaps, however, poor Sir Hyde Parker, too, had his sorrows. He had the relation to his second-in-command that a stick has to the rocket to which it is tied, and even the tamest and most lethargic of admirals might well feel uncomfortable under such conditions. With feminine keenness of insight

Lady Malmesbury summed up the situation later on. "I feel very sorry for Sir Hyde," she wrote; "but no wise man would ever have gone with Nelson, or over him, as he was sure to be in the background in every case." Nelson, in truth, must have been a somewhat difficult subordinate. He himself, writing in 1796, says: "Our captain told me, 'You did just as you pleased in Lord Hood's time, the same in Admiral Hotham's, and now again with Sir John Jervis. It makes no difference to you who is commander-in-chief.'" Nelson expresses much indignant wonder at this summary of his own characteristics, but there was, at least, some truth in the picture.

According to a story told in the *Naval Chronicle* of the period, a turbot was the real cause of the battle of Copenhagen being won! Nelson knew his ungenial chief was fond of that dainty; he captured one, and sent it, in rough weather and at some risk, as a present to Sir Hyde. This brought back a letter of thanks from the Admiral, whence grew friendlier relations, frank consultation, and finally the hearty support which enabled Nelson to win one of the great victories which constitute his fame. But this tale of the turbot may be, perhaps, dismissed as a mere flourish of marine satire.

The fleet, fighting its way through stormy weather, was off the Skaw on March 19, whence the Cattegat runs southward betwixt the Danish and Swedish

shores to the island of Zealand, on the east face of which lies Copenhagen. Parker anchored, while a messenger was sent forward to present the British demand for the withdrawal of Denmark from the League, an answer being required within forty-eight hours. This delay both chafed Nelson's eager spirit and affronted his common-sense. "I hate your pen-and-ink men," he wrote; "a fleet of British ships of war are the best negotiators in Europe." But what use are even such persuasive negotiators when out of sight under the horizon? Nelson knew well that "things seen are mightier than things heard," and he would have carried the fleet straight up the Sound, and sustained the British demand by the spectacle of the tall masts and stately hulls of eighteen great line-of-battle ships. "While negotiation is going on," he said, "the Dane should see our flag waving every time he lifts up his head." And there can be no doubt Nelson was right. That fleet, hidden beyond the sea-line, had little power to impress the Danish imagination. Moreover, loss of time in war has commonly to be redeemed by rivers of blood. It was not merely that every hour's loitering strengthened the Danish defences and meant new difficulties to the British. Every hour as it slipped by was fraught with the possibility of seeing a Swedish squadron from Stockholm, or a Russian squadron from Revel, appear on the scene.

The Russian fleet at this moment was divided

into two squadrons—one in Kronstadt, the other in Revel, and both ice-bound. Nelson's advice always was, "In the case of a Frenchman, close with him; of a Russian, out-mancœuvre him." With clear insight Nelson saw that the opportunity of crushing the Russian fleet in detail was of priceless value. He urged his chief to run past Copenhagen—if necessary to mask it by a detachment—and fall upon the Russian squadron isolated at Revel. That would break the naval strength of Russia, and the Northern League would instantly fall to pieces. But Sir Hyde Parker was an unenterprising pedant, a slave to rules—not, like Nelson, their master. He would not go up the Baltic with the Danish fleet undestroyed in his rear. Nothing remained but to attack the Danish fleet at Copenhagen, and Parker lingered over even this with pedantic formality, when every hour wasted had to be paid for with the lives of brave men.

On March 23 the British envoy returned to the fleet. The Danes would not yield. They were toiling with fiery energy to strengthen their defences, and the account brought of these was alarming. The whisper ran through the fleet that the Danes were too strong to be attacked, and Parker called a council of war. Now a commander who, having power to attack without consulting anybody, calls a council of war, is obviously himself secretly indisposed to fight, and wants to use the opinions of

others as a screen for his own. In the council of war, which met in the cabin of the British flagship, however, Nelson was, by force of genius and will, the controlling spirit. "Now we are sure of fighting," he wrote to Lady Hamilton, just before he left his ship for the council, "I am sent for. When it was a joke I was kept in the background; to-morrow will, I hope, be a proud day for England."

There was gloom on the faces of the officers who sat round the table in the *London's* state-cabin. They were brave men, and each captain, singly, would have laid his ship alongside a Frenchman of anything less than twice his strength with the utmost cheerfulness. But they shrank from the responsibility of taking the fleet through the tangle of hidden shoals and crooked channels, swept by eddying tides, against the great defences which, by this time, barred the entrance to Copenhagen. Vansittart, the British envoy, who had just returned from that city, declared the defences to be so strong that attack by the fleet was hopeless. It was a landsman's opinion, who had never seen a British fleet—especially one led by Nelson—in action; but his judgment weighed heavily on the mind of Sir Hyde Parker.

Nelson kept his head, and shrewdly cross-examined Vansittart as to the details of the Danish arrangements. A rough map was on the table before him. It showed that there were two channels running down

to Copenhagen, parted by a great shoal called the Middle Ground. The inner, known as the King's Channel, was the open course, but it was barred by a strong line of floating batteries, and flanked by a great work, the strongest feature in the Danish defence, known as the Three Crown Battery. Over 600 heavy guns, in a word, barred, as with a sword of flame, the approach by this channel. A narrow channel called the Dutch Deep, running along the other edge of the Middle Ground, was much more perilous in its navigation, but it avoided the Three Crown Battery, and led to the tail, so to speak, of the Danish defences. As Nelson studied the map, the plan of attack grew plain to him. To attack by the King's Channel was, he said, "taking the bull by the horns;" to go by the other channel was to attack the tail of the animal. Nelson expounded his plan, while the weather-beaten faces of the scamen round the council-table were bent over the chart. Then, kindling as he talked, Nelson concluded, "Go by the Sound or by the Belt, or anyhow; only lose not an hour."

They were brave men who sat round the table, and they caught fire at Nelson's words. Sir Hyde Parker's plan was to wait in the Cattegat till all the squadrons in the Baltic—Swedish, Russian, or Danish—came streaming to battle. That was the tamer policy, and a tame policy is, in the long-run, usually the most perilous. The daring plan was also the

safer—to crush each squadron in detail, and before they could combine. On the next day, March 24, Nelson submitted his views in writing to his admiral. “Here you are,” he wrote to him, “with almost the safety, certainly with the honour of England, more entrusted to you than ever yet fell to the lot of a British officer.” “I am of opinion,” he says, “that boldest measures are the safest;” and he urges that the attack should be made by the passage known as the Dutch Deep. The seamanship of the fleet was equal to the task of taking the ships through that perilous channel; the Danish defences would be struck at their weakest point; and, in addition, the only approach by which the Russian or Swedish squadrons could come to the help of the Danes would be barred.

On March 26 the British fleet moved still nearer to Copenhagen, and dropped anchor; on the 30th they swept in stately procession through the Straits of Elsinore. These are only three miles wide; Swedish batteries guarded one shore and Danish the other. As the Swedish batteries were lighter, the British ran within a mile of them. They were silent, while the Danish batteries barked angrily and vainly from the opposite shore. “More powder and shot,” Nelson wrote, “I believe, never was thrown away.” Not a British ship was struck.

On the afternoon of March 31 another council of war was held. Nelson, meanwhile, had wrought

out his plans in detail, and had closely studied the enemy's position. He offered with ten seventy-fours to attack and destroy the Danish defences. In the discussion which followed many difficulties were raised and discussed. Colonel Stewart, who was present at the council, has left a graphic picture of the scene. "Lord Nelson," he says, "kept pacing the cabin, mortified at everything which savoured either of alarm or of irresolution." Some one reminded the council of the strength of the Swedish squadron, whereupon Nelson sharply interjected, "The more numerous the better." When the Russian strength, again, was dwelt upon, he repeatedly said, "I wish they were twice as many. The easier the victory, depend on it!" Nor was that sentiment a mere flash of combative energy. He knew the Northern fleets were innocent of tactical skill. They would fight doggedly, but could not manœuvre; and their very numbers, under such conditions, would be a disadvantage.

Parker at last made his resolve. He assigned to Nelson twelve seventy-fours instead of the ten he asked, and gave him absolute control over all the details of the attack. Nelson at once hoisted his flag on board the *Elephant*, and on the morning of April 1 the signal to weigh anchor ran to the masthead of that vessel.

The log of a youthful middy on the *Monarch* gives us a picture of how Nelson took command of

the fighting squadron. "On April 1st," he says, "I observed a light gig pulling towards us, and at the end of the boat was a cocked hat put on square and much lower than the others. I ran to the officer of the watch and told him Lord Nelson was coming on board; I had seen his hat. Soon the old checked surtout was recognised, and presently a squeaking little voice hailed the *Monarch* and desired us, in the true Norfolk drawl, to prepare to weigh."

Seven ships of seventy-four guns, three of sixty-four, two of fifty, with five frigates, and a squadron of bomb-vessels and fire-ships, formed Nelson's force; and directly the signal to weigh was discovered flying from the masthead of the *Elephant*, a shout, deep-toned and far-heard, rolled through the fleet, such as those waters never yet heard. Nelson had spent the two previous nights in personally exploring the channel through which he was to take his ships, and had been semi-frozen by the extreme cold in the process. But with such skill had the twisted and perilous channel been sounded, that, with the *Amazon* leading, the long line of seventy-fours came slowly up the Dutch Deep, coasting, and sometimes grazing, the very edge of the shoal, till at nightfall it dropped anchor within two miles of the Danish batteries.

CHAPTER VIII

COPENHAGEN

THAT night Nelson summoned all his captains to dinner on board the *Elephant*. Colonel Stewart gives a vivid description of the scene. Foley was there, who was the first to cross the head of the French line at the Nile; Hardy, in whose arms Nelson himself was to fall at Trafalgar; Riou, "the gallant good Riou" of Campbell's ballad, for whom that was the last night on earth. Nelson himself was in the highest spirits; and, holding high the glass in his solitary left hand, gave as a toast, "A leading wind and success the next day." The time of doubts and of hesitating counsels was past. The lights of Copenhagen shone in the sky straight over the British bowsprits. These gallant seamen were sure of themselves and of their men; while for their leader, who sat, a slender and sorely battered figure, one-armed and one-eyed, at the head of the table, the universal feeling was one of a passionate admiration and devotion.

When the last toast had been drunk and his captains had gone back to their ships, Nelson and

Foley set themselves to draw up the detailed instructions for the next day, while Hardy pushed off under the darkness in a boat, to sound the channel down to the point where it curved round the Middle Ground and swept in front of the Danish batteries. It was a daring act, performed with audacious coolness. Hardy, with muffled oars, crept close to the leading ship of the Danish line, and, using a pole instead of a lead-line, so as to avoid noise, sounded all round that ship. By eleven o'clock he was back, reporting to Nelson the soundings of the channel right down to the enemy's line. If Nelson had trusted to Hardy's soundings, rather than to the very imperfect knowledge and uncertain nerve of his pilots, it had been happier for the British fortunes next day. Nelson was so exhausted that he had to lie in his cot while he dictated his instructions to Foley; half-a-dozen clerks sitting in the forecabin to transcribe copies of these for each captain.

Nelson had a vivid and creative imagination, which enabled him to see in orderly succession, and as if in dazzling sunlight, all the evolving stages of a great battle about to be fought, and to provide for each in turn. His plan was simple. The Danish defences were of great strength; eighteen vessels—all of great size, some of them mastless—formed a line of floating batteries a mile and a half long, and armed with the heaviest guns. To the north

the line was flanked by the great Three Crown Batteries; to the south heavy gun and mortar batteries had been erected on Amag Island. The entrance to the harbour itself was barred by a huge chain, and was covered by the fire of shore batteries and of some line-of-battle ships. The Danes, it must be remembered, have a strain of the sea-rover's blood in them. They were fighting in sight of their homes, and under the eyes of their wives and children. They were sure to fight desperately. Nelson, in a word, with one-half the British fleet—all the heavier ships lying idly in the offing as mere spectators—was to attack a position of enormous strength, held by a most gallant enemy, and to attack through navigation so tangled and perilous that at any moment he might find half his fleet stranded.

On the morning of April 2 the wind blew fair for the channel, and at ten o'clock the pilots of the fleet were summoned on board the flagship to receive their last instructions. In a sense they were amateurs, the mates or masters of Baltic traders, supposed to be familiar with the channel, and pressed into this particular service. But their nerve failed them. They had no charts. They were unaccustomed to handle ships of such size. To steer the great British seventy-fours through the twisting shallows before them, along or across which the sea-tides ran with the fury of a mill-race, was too much for

these simple-minded merchant sailors. Nelson had a very unhappy quarter of an hour when he found that his amateur pilots failed him, and the pilots themselves had probably one of a still unhappier character.

At last Murray, in the *Edgar*, undertook to lead. Ship after ship weighed in succession, and, each with its topsail on the caps, rounded the shoulder of the Middle Ground, and, with swelling canvas and crews at quarters, came, a majestic line, up the channel. To quote Campbell's noble ballad:—

“It was ten of April morn by the chime
As they drifted on their path.
There was silence deep as death,
And the boldest held his breath
For a time.”

The log of the *Monarch's* midday, already quoted, gives a curious picture of the stately lead of the *Edgar*. “A more beautiful and solemn sight I never witnessed. The *Edgar* led the van. . . . A man-of-war is at all times a beautiful sight, but at such a time the spectacle is overwhelming. We saw her passing on through the enemy's fire, and moving in the midst of it to gain her station. Our minds were seized with a sort of awe. Not a word was spoken through the ship save by the pilot and helmsmen, and their commands, being chanted very much in the same manner as the responses in a Cathedral service, added to the solemnity.”

Nelson had arranged his plans in minutest detail. The three leading ships were to pass up the hostile line, firing as they went, till the fifth Dane was reached. The van British ship was then to anchor by the stern, and devote its energy to the destruction of that particular Dane; the two ships in her rear were to pass ahead and engage the ships next succeeding, while the fourth and fifth ships in the British line were to anchor astern of number one. The remainder of the column was to pass outside the engaged ships, and each vessel anchor in turn as it cleared the ship ahead. Each British ship, in this way, would be covered in its advance till it reached its particular foe, while the last joints in the tail of the Danish line, exposed to the fire of so many fresh ships in succession, would be destroyed. Then the ships engaged with them were to cut their anchors and move ahead to join in the fight. The frigates and the fire-ships, under Riou, were held as a reserve.

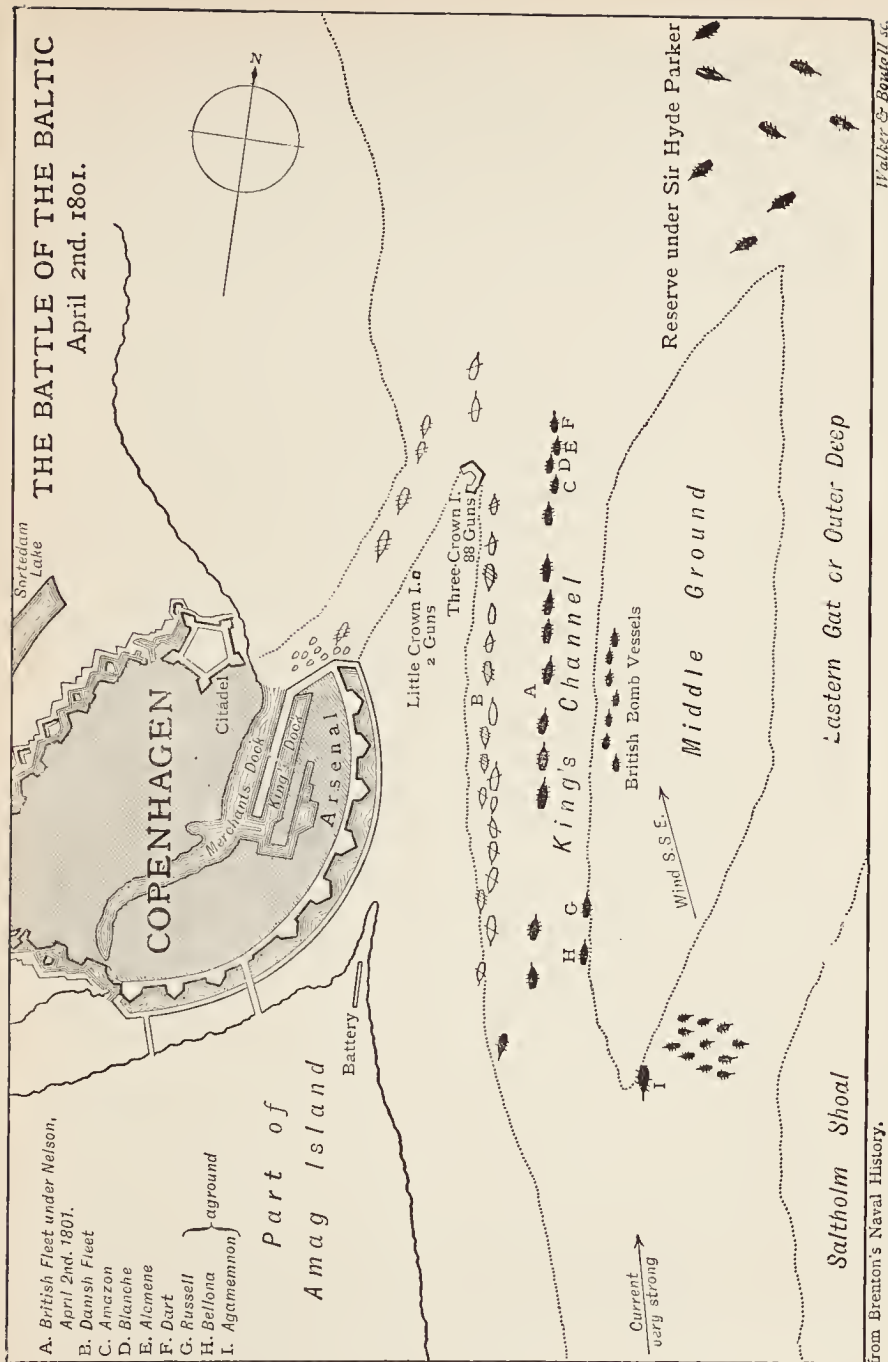
The chances of navigation, however, spoiled Nelson's exquisitely perfect tactics. The *Agamemnon* failed to weather the shoulder of the Middle Ground, and went ignobly ashore, the set of the tide holding her fast. The *Bellona*, following her—a majestic ship, with men at quarters and canvas wide-spread—next touched the muddy foot of the Middle Ground, and in a moment was helpless, the great hull heeling over till her guns pointed to the sky. The gliding hull of the *Russell* came next in sight round

the shoulder of the Middle Ground, but, following the *Bellona* too faithfully, in another moment shared her fate, her jib-boom almost touching the *Bellona's* taffrail as the great ship, with all her sails shivering, grounded. Thus before a shot was fired, one-fourth of Nelson's fleet was practically cancelled!

Nelson himself, in the *Elephant*, followed the *Russell*. As the charts showed, the water grew shallower westward, or to larboard. His orders were that each ship was to pass its leader on its starboard side. But the *Elephant's* leader was hopelessly ashore! Which course should Nelson take? If he had followed the charts, or obeyed his own orders, and tried to pass the *Russell* on its starboard side, the *Elephant*, too, would have grounded, and in that case the battle of Copenhagen would never have been fought, or might have been a British defeat. The interval betwixt the ships was narrow, Nelson had but an instant for his choice, but that instant was sufficient. The position of the stranded ships, the scour of the tide, the slope of the distant mud-bank which formed the Middle Ground, all were judged. He grasped the new situation. To try to pass to the starboard of the grounded ships was certain ruin. A single cool sentence sent the wheel whirling round, and the *Elephant* glided past the stranded *Russell* into the true channel, ship after ship following. Great battles often turn on tiny accidents. The master of the *Queen Charlotte* probably decided

THE BATTLE OF THE BALTIC

April 2nd. 1801.



the great fight of the First of June by a single swing of that ship's wheel, and it is scarcely an exaggeration to say that Nelson's sudden order, which sent the *Elephant* to the larboard of the *Russell*, determined the issue of the battle of Copenhagen.

The three great ships ashore were to have engaged the Three Crown Batteries, and, as they were suddenly flung out of the fight, Nelson had to throw his reserves—a cluster of mere frigates under Riou—into the gap. And nothing in the gallant fighting of that day is more gallant than the story of how Riou and his frigates fought the batteries for which three seventy-fours were scarcely reckoned an equivalent.

Nelson, characteristically, had chosen the biggest ship in the Danish line—the flag-ship—a great seventy-four, as his own private antagonist, but the stranded ships made some change necessary. Nelson anchored immediately ahead of the *Glatton*, and hailed the *Ganges* to close in ahead of him, and the *Monarch* in turn, closing ahead of the *Glatton*, thus had the honour of engaging the Danish flag-ship instead of Nelson.

The thunder of the guns now rolled, deep and stern, from end to end of the battle-line. The ships, on an average, were not more than 100 fathoms apart. Here was, in a word, a narrow water-lane a mile and a half long. On one side lay the great floating Danish batteries, on the other were the tall masts and stately hulls of the British ships. Along that sea-lane some

2000 guns were bellowing ; a line of dancing pointed flame ran ceaselessly along either edge of that ribbon of water, a rushing tempest of shot smote ships and floating batteries alike. For three hours that terrible cannonade roared, with no break in the diapason of its thunder. Black smoke, rising in vast clouds, drifted over the roofs, and churches, and towers of the city, crowded with spectators. The eddying smoke soon hid the whole field of battle ; only the topmasts of the British seventy-fours, proud and tall, and tipped with the fluttering crimson of the meteor flag of England, could be seen above it. Nelson in the evening of that day wrote, "I have been in 105 engagements, but this is the most terrible of them all."

Nothing, indeed, could well surpass the stubborn enduring courage of the Danes. Again and again as the firing of a Danish ship or floating battery died away, owing to the mere slaughter of its crew, it was manned afresh by volunteers from the shore, who took the place of their fallen comrades, crowding into the choking blackness of the 'tween-decks, and working the blood-splashed and heated guns afresh, until they in turn perished under the terrible British fire. There was no difference in native courage, as a matter of fact, on either side. The men who fought under the white cross of Denmark, or under the "blood-red flag" of England, alike came from the stock of fierce sea-rovers. But discipline told, and method, and leader-

ship, and the pride bred of many victories. All this gave a deadly concentration to the British attack. Nelson's ships won, and won, in brief, by the superior energy, speed, and quality of their fire.

How terrible was that fire, yet how steadfast was the courage with which it was sustained, was shown by the condition of the prizes when the fight was over. The British flag, in fact, reaped a scantier harvest of prizes—prizes that could be carried off and anchored at Portsmouth or Sheerness—from Copenhagen than from any other great fight in the war. No Danish ship struck till it was practically at sinking-point. Foley, who, as Nelson's flag-captain, commanded the *Elephant*, said afterwards that in four hours' fighting at Copenhagen he burned fifty more barrels of gunpowder than in the long night-battle of the Nile! How deadly was the fire of the Danes, again, may be judged from the slaughter in the British ships. Thus the *Edgar* had 142 of her crew struck down; on the decks of the *Monarch*, when the fight was over, no less than 218 officers and men lay wounded or dead.

Meanwhile the heavier ships of the British fleet were lying in the offing, watching the fight with such feelings as may be guessed. There were two huge ships of ninety-eight guns, four heavy seventy-fours, and two ships of sixty-four guns. The men hung in the shrouds watching the vast and whirling clouds of battle-smoke that rose high and drifted

to leeward, and listening to the unceasing roar of the furious cannonade. How eagerly those great ships would have joined in the desperate fight! But on the quarter-deck of the *London* there was sharp anxiety. For three hours the tumult of the battle had raged, and what might not have happened to the British fleet in that tangle of shoals, swept by the fire of a thousand Danish guns! Parker talked of making the signal to discontinue the action. His flag-captain, Otway, with better faith in Nelson and his seventy-fours, strongly objected to this, and at last, with Parker's permission, leaped into a boat to pull down to the distant fight, board the *Elephant*, and learn from Nelson himself how things were going. But when Otway had gone, and there was no strong will to stiffen Parker's courage, the ill-omened signal, "No. 39," ran to the head of the *London's* mast.

Nelson, at that moment, was walking his quarter-deck in that precise mood of serene contentment and of hawk-like vigilance into which the tumult of a great fight always lifted him. The *Elephant* was anchored on the bow of the Danish flagship, and was fighting that monster and some shore batteries at the same time. Not a Dane as yet had struck. The tension of the battle was at its highest. "It is warm work," said Nelson to Colonel Stewart, who was walking to and fro with him on the *Elephant's* quarter-deck. "This day may be the last to any of us at a

moment." Then stopping short in his walk, he added, says Stewart, with emotion, "But, mark you, I would not be elsewhere for thousands." A moment afterwards the signal-lieutenant reported that "No. 39," or "Cease action," was flying from the masthead of the *London*. Nelson made no sign, but walked the length of his quarter-deck once more. The signal-lieutenant, standing at the gangway, waited till Nelson came up again in his walk; then, as he turned, asked whether he should repeat the signal,—pass it on, that is, to the fleet generally. "No," said Nelson, "acknowledge it." As the officer moved off, Nelson, slightly raising his voice, asked, "Is my signal, No. 16"—for close action—"flying?" "Yes, my lord," was the answer. "Mind you keep it so," said Nelson.

Nelson traversed his quarter-deck once or twice, the stump of his right arm jerking; then, turning to Stewart, he said sharply, "Do you know what is shown on the commander-in-chief?—No. 39." Stewart asked what that meant. "Why, to leave off action," said Nelson. "Leave off action now! d—— me if I do!" Then, turning to Captain Foley, he said, "You know, Foley, I have only one eye. I have a right to be blind sometimes." Then, with his expressive face gleaming with humour, he put the glass to his blind eye and exclaimed, "I really do not see the signal." Finally, he dismissed the matter by saying, "D—— the signal! Keep mine for closer action flying."

That incident has stamped itself on the popular imagination more vividly than, perhaps, any other in Nelson's life. But it is a point still keenly debated whether Parker meant his signal seriously, and whether Nelson was really guilty of a "glorious disobedience" when he disregarded it. There is some reason for believing that Parker's signal was really a generous act on his part, giving Nelson the opportunity to draw off from the fight, if he judged it prudent, without loss of honour. Scott, Parker's chaplain, says that this meaning of No. 39, if it should be hoisted, was agreed upon before the battle betwixt the two admirals. Otway, again, carried a verbal message to Nelson, according to some versions, that No. 39, if hoisted, would only be permissive, not mandatory.

But Otway's message, if the story be true, is inconsistent with Scott's version, that such an understanding already existed betwixt the admirals; and in any case, the signal was hoisted before Otway's boat could reach the *Elephant*. Colonel Hutchinson, who commanded a detachment of the 49th on the *Monarch*, says, it is true, in his journal that No. 39 was "a discretionary signal." But Hutchinson's journal was written after the battle, and it is certain that Nelson did not understand it to be "a discretionary signal." He knew nothing of a verbal understanding in advance as to the meaning of No. 39. When the fight was ended he said to Foley, "Well, I have fought

contrary to orders, and I shall perhaps be hanged. Never mind! Let them." Weeks after, when Addington, the Premier, referring to this very signal, told Nelson he was a bold man to disregard the orders of his superior, Nelson replied that the real test of the value of an officer was his capacity for accepting a perilous responsibility. "But," he added, "in the midst of it all I depended upon you. I knew that, happen what might, if I did my duty you would stand by me." Whether Nelson really thought of Addington on the quarter-deck of the *Elephant* may perhaps be doubted; but the British Premier himself was accustomed to repeat Nelson's words, and describe them as the most splendid compliment he had ever received!

On the whole, the evidence seems to prove that Parker hoisted No. 39 with the serious purpose of calling off his too daring second-in-command from a fight that seemed desperate, and Nelson's scornful rejection of the unhappy signal was an act of heroic disobedience. No. 39 at the *London's* mast-head and No. 16 at the peak of the *Elephant*, as a matter of fact, measured the difference between the two admirals. Parker's signal had one disastrous effect. Riou's frigates were engaged in a fierce duel with the Three Crown Batteries when the *London's* signal to "cease action" was noted. Riou himself was wounded, but burned with fierce anger at having to abandon the fight. "What will Nelson think

of us?" he said. But as the *Amazon*, Riou's ship, ceased firing, the smoke blew clear of her, the Danish battery had the British ship in full sight just as she swung round to bear out of the fight, and the Danes raked her with deadly effect, one shot cutting Riou almost in two.

By two o'clock the crisis of the battle was past; the Danish fire had begun to slacken. The *Dannebrog*, the enemy's flagship, found the *Elephant's* fire too fierce. Its cables were cut; it went drifting down the Danish line, a great pile of leaping flames, spreading terror everywhere, its crew throwing themselves out of the gun-ports. At half-past three it blew up. Some of the floating batteries had sunk, others had cut their cables and drifted out of the fight. The Danish battle-line, in a word, was wrecked. More than one Danish ship had struck, and then, with indignant valour, had resumed fighting afresh. The great Three Crown Battery, too, at the head of the Danish line, was still firing on the British across the Danish ships that had hauled down their flags. Nelson's position was difficult. He could not stop the fire of the Three Crown Battery; he could not draw off from the fight without passing under the stroke of its guns.

But his quick brain swiftly found a resource. He sent a boat ashore with a flag of truce carrying a letter to the Prince Regent. It was addressed "To the brothers of Englishmen, the Danes." If the

firing was kept up, Nelson wrote, he would be obliged to burn his prizes "without having the power of saving the brave Danes who had defended them." Nelson wrote the letter with his solitary left hand, making the easing of the *Elephant's* rudder-head his desk, his secretary copying it as he wrote. The original was put in an envelope, which the secretary was about to close with a wafer. Nelson would not allow this, and a marine was sent for taper and wax. A shot killed him while on his message. "Send another messenger," said Nelson, and when the wax was brought, he sealed the letter with leisurely care. Stewart asked him afterwards why, in circumstances so urgent, he lingered over such details. Nelson replied that if a letter with the wafer still wet had reached the Danish Crown Prince, he would have concluded that it was sent off in a hurry, and that the British had some very pressing reasons for the hurry.

The Crown Prince, in reply, sent to ask Nelson's particular object in sending him the flag of truce. Nelson answered that his motive was humanity; he "would consent to a cessation of hostilities till he had burnt or removed his prizes, first taking off their crews as prisoners, and sending all wounded Danes ashore." The Crown Prince accepted these terms, firing ceased, and Nelson withdrew his ships and rejoined Parker north of the Middle Ground. It shows the difficulties of the position that three of the



NELSON

From an engraving after a drawing by H. EDRIDGE

British ships, including the *Elephant*, grounded within easy reach of the Danish batteries during the process of withdrawal, and might have suffered much harm but for the truce which had been agreed upon.

Nelson summed up the results of the battle in a letter: "Of eighteen sail, large and small, some are taken, some sunk, some burnt in the good old way." The British loss in killed or wounded was 943; the loss of the Danes reached 1800, while no less than 3500 prisoners were taken in the captured ships. As a result of the negotiations which followed, an armistice of fourteen weeks was agreed upon, Nelson, who conducted the negotiations in person, frankly explaining that the truce was wanted to enable him to attack and crush the Russian squadrons in Revel and Kronstadt.

Eight days before the battle of the Baltic an event took place which did as much as even Nelson's guns to shatter the Northern Confederacy. On the night of March 24, the Czar, Paul I., was assassinated. His half-crazed intellect made his reign a peril to Russia, his alliance with France was hateful to Russian sentiment, his quarrel with Great Britain was a serious blow to Russian trade. A popular caricature of the period represents the Czar holding a label in his right hand with the word "Order" upon it; a similar label in his left hand bears the word "Counter-order," while across the Czar's forehead is inscribed the word "Disorder." The Russian system

of government, according to a familiar epigram, is a "despotism tempered by assassination;" and the despotism of Paul was brought to an end with the knife. The death of the Czar, added to Nelson's victory at Copenhagen, wrecked the great combination of the Northern sea-powers which Bonaparte, with so much art, had called into existence. The first act of the new Czar was to release the British seamen his father had imprisoned, a sign of the new influence now supreme in Russian politics.

In 1801, however, news travelled slowly, and the British were as yet unaware of the Czar's death. Nelson was eager to complete his task by reaching, and crushing, the Russian squadrons while they were still scattered. On April 12 the fleet moved up the Baltic. Nelson had hoisted his flag in the *St. George*, but this ship was not ready to move, and was left behind. Presently there came a rumour that the Swedish squadron had put to sea; a battle might take place with Nelson absent! The mere thought of it kindled Nelson into flame. He jumped into a boat, refusing to wait for a cloak, and started with six oars to pull against wind and current across twenty-four miles of stormy sea. The officer with him wished to put his greatcoat on Nelson's attenuated and shivering figure. "No," said Nelson, "I am not cold. My anxiety for my country will keep me warm." If the fleet had sailed, Nelson vowed he would pursue it to Carlscrona in the boat—

another fifty leagues! Nelson reached the *Elephant* at midnight. "On April 23," he wrote to Lady Hamilton, "I rowed five hours on a bitter cold night, and the cold struck me to the heart. . . . From that time to the end of May I brought up what every one thought was my lungs, and I was emaciated more than you can conceive."

On April 23 the fleet moved up to Carlserona, when a lugger brought despatches from the new Czar, Alexander I., with overtures for peace; whereupon Parker, welcoming any excuse for suspending action, took the fleet back to Kiøge Bay. This chafed Nelson greatly. The three Russian squadrons, at Carlserona, Kronstadt, and Revel, if united, would be formidable. The British had a fair wind and a fleet of eighteen ships, and the opportunity of crushing the enemy in detail. Even if the Russians were disposed for peace, their pacific intentions, Nelson argued, would be reinforced by the appearance of the British fleet off Revel, rather than lying at Kiøge Bay, 400 miles distant.

On May 5 instructions reached the fleet recalling Parker and putting Nelson in command. At last he had a free hand. Had that change taken place three months earlier the battle of the Baltic need never have been fought. Nelson's first signal was to "prepare to weigh." He had to wait until the tedious Sir Hyde Parker had gone, but on the 7th the fleet was in full sail. On the 12th it was off Revel, but the

enemy had gone! Only three days before the Russian fleet had weighed anchor and sailed for Kronstadt. The junction of the Russian fleet was thus complete; and had the policy of Russia still been warlike, the time Parker had wasted at the entrance of the Baltic must now have been redeemed by a fight yet more bloody than that off Copenhagen.

But Russia had definitely committed itself to a new policy. The Czar had not yet come, as he afterwards did, under the magic of Bonaparte's influence. He released the British ships under embargo, while Great Britain, in turn, set free the Danish and Swedish ships she had seized, and on June 17 a convention betwixt Russia and England was signed which closed the quarrel. The other Northern Powers in turn signed similar treaties. It was conceded that the neutral flag should not cover an enemy's goods; the right to search merchant ships under convoy was modified, and naval stores were no longer classed as contraband of war. The settlement reached on these points, however, was but the symbol of a much greater result. The effort to combine the Northern Powers against the naval supremacy of Great Britain was shattered. Bonaparte must begin to weave some new combination. The first move in the great game had been won by England.

CHAPTER IX

THE TRUCE OF AMIENS

THE death of Paul I. was a great blow to Bonaparte, and Fouché records that when the news reached him, for the first time in his life Bonaparte broke into the passionate exclamation, "Mon Dieu!" "He gave vent to his passion," Fouché adds, "in ejaculations, stampings of the foot, and short fits of rage. I never beheld so striking a scene." The death of the Czar and Nelson's guns at Copenhagen had, as a matter of fact, struck from the hands of Bonaparte the weapon by which he hoped to destroy Great Britain. How convenient and how magnificent a tool the Czar might have been is hardly, perhaps, realised. Bonaparte had submitted to him a wild scheme for the overthrow of the British power in India. A French force of 35,000 men was to descend the Danube, be transported across the Black Sea, march along the course of the Volga and cross the Caspian to Astrakhan. Here the French were to be joined by an equal force of Russians, and the combined army would march on India through Persia. Paul had seriously meditated join-

ing in an adventure so exactly suited to his lunatic brain!

But after the League of Armed Neutrality had vanished, it was clear that peace was necessary to both combatants, even if that peace were nothing better than an armed and angry truce, a mere prelude to a yet more furious struggle. Bonaparte was eager to consolidate his newly-won power, and to reconstruct the sorely shattered system of French administration. And there was at least one motive pricking him to haste in the termination of the war. The French still held Alexandria. If peace could be concluded before that place fell, Egypt would remain in the hands of Bonaparte. In the game of negotiations for peace it would be a card of great value. The courage of England was as high as ever, but its resources were sorely strained by the cost and waste of the strife. There had been nine years of war—war which had brought with it great burdens and, except upon the sea, little glory. All the allies of Great Britain had fallen from her. France in 1792 had threatened to overrun the Continent with the energy of Revolutionary principles. That threat, it is true, had not been fulfilled. The Revolution had exhausted itself, even in France. An empire as despotic as that of the Bourbons had arisen. But what France had failed to do by the contagion of its Revolutionary fever it had accomplished by force of arms. And against this menacing power England

stood alone. Why should not the peace which had fallen on the distracted Continent extend to Great Britain?

And the moment seemed favourable. Pitt, the high-minded but unyielding antagonist of Revolutionary France, was no longer Prime Minister of Great Britain. The Addington Cabinet was in power, and it represented a desire on the part of the British nation for peace. The new Government which had arisen in France was at least Anti-Jacobin; it might be stable, it might even prove pacific. Bonaparte, it is true, as soon as the League of the Northern Powers was shattered, began to frame a plan for the direct invasion of England. The scheme of the great Boulogne flotilla took form in his mind; a camp was formed on the French hills that look across the narrow seas to the hazy shores of England, and the threat of invasion kindled both anger and alarm throughout Great Britain. The story of the Boulogne flotilla, however, stretches through four years, and may be better told as a complete episode in a succeeding chapter.

Negotiations for peace betwixt the two nations were begun, and on October, 1, 1801, the preliminaries were signed in London. The actual treaty was only signed at Amiens on March 27, 1802, and the history of the negotiations, always shrewish, and oftentimes interrupted, which stretched through those six months, sufficiently proved that any peace

they effected must be of the most fragile character. As a matter of fact, while the Treaty of Luneville secured peace to the Continent for four years, that of Amiens suspended war on the sea for scarcely more than twelve months.

The news of the fall of Alexandria reached England the day after the preliminaries were signed. Bonaparte, it was shrewdly suspected, knew it earlier, and thus, at the very first step, he outbargained his rival. England had to learn, later, that by a treaty with Portugal France acquired new territory in Brazil; by another with Spain she had made herself mistress of Louisiana. Bonaparte, too, availed himself of the truce created by the preliminaries to despatch a great expedition of 20,000 troops to Hayti. France, in a word, was restoring, and even triumphantly extending, her colonial empire. In addition, Bonaparte proceeded, in the words of Lanfrey, to effect "the definite confiscation" of the smaller states on the borders of France, and which, though semi-dependent, yet had a separate existence. A mild *coup-d'état* was brought about in Holland which placed that country absolutely under French control. Switzerland was treated with similar art and for a similar end.

So tedious were the negotiations, and so alarming the commentary of events upon them, that Great Britain commenced to re-commission her fleets, and the English ambassador, Cornwallis, was instructed

to leave Amiens in eight days if the treaty was not definitely signed. This brought matters to an issue, and on March 27, 1802, the treaty was completed. France withdrew her forces from Naples and the Roman States, guaranteed the independence of the republics on her borders, but, in the main, retained her possessions on the Continent. Great Britain surrendered Elba, Malta, Minorca, all her West Indian conquests except Trinidad, the Cape of Good Hope, Dutch Guiana, &c. She retained of the colonial possessions her fleets had won only Ceylon and Trinidad. Perhaps the most important surrender she made was that of Malta, the key of the Mediterranean. This was to be evacuated in three months, and occupied by Neapolitan troops, under the guarantee of the six great Continental Powers.

Great Britain surrendered much by this treaty. As Lord Grenville complained, the treaty was constructed on the principle of England giving up all she had taken, and France keeping all she had acquired during the war. Sheridan condensed the general sentiment into an epigram. "It was a peace," he said, "of which everybody was glad and nobody proud."

With greater truth it might have been said that while everybody welcomed the peace, nobody was satisfied with the treaty. But it was felt that scarcely any price was too great to pay for a moment's

breathing space, and the treaty was welcomed with much popular enthusiasm in England. The new French ambassador was drawn in triumph through the streets of London, much to Nelson's disgust. "There is no person in the world," he wrote, "rejoices more in the peace than I do, but I would sooner burst than let a d—d Frenchman know it!" The treaty gave equal pleasure to France, if not to its chief. The so-called "Peace of Amiens" was, as a matter of fact, a brief and sullen truce—a mere prelude to fresh and yet more bloody strife. Yet it marks the close of the first great stage in the Revolutionary war. Henceforth the struggle was not betwixt the Revolution and Europe, with the struggle against England as an accidental detail. It was a contest betwixt Napoleon and Great Britain, with the Continental war as a varying and incidental feature of that struggle.

The French Senate marked its sense of Bonaparte's success by passing a decree making him First Consul for a further term of ten years, dating from the expiration of the decade for which he then held office, making seventeen years in all. That term of seventeen years, however, seemed to Bonaparte himself insultingly inadequate. He received the proposal with every sign of passion, and declared the Senate had "usurped the rights of the people." As a matter of fact, before those seventeen years had expired, Napoleon was a prisoner at St. Helena—an anti-

climax which kindly fate hid from his eyes. The question, "Shall Napoleon Bonaparte be chosen Consul for life?" was submitted to a popular vote, and affirmed by an overwhelming plebiscite.

The "peace" of Amiens quickly became a form of imperfectly disguised war. As Bonaparte read the treaty, it banished England from the Continent. She had lost all right to protest against any changes wrought on that great stage. All Europe was at the disposal of France. Old States were to vanish like dreams, and new ones to arise like phantoms, at the word of Bonaparte, and for his aggrandisement, while England was told that she had lost the right to so much as protest against such changes.

Piedmont and Elba, accordingly, became French military departments. The Republic of Liguria disappeared, and a French military division took its place. Switzerland was occupied by a French army under Ney. Bonaparte added to the titles which already adorned him that of Grand Mediator of the Helvetian Republic. The French troops still remained in occupation of Holland, which in fact, though not in name, became a French department. When Great Britain remonstrated, she was warned, in reply, that the First Consul might "revive the Empire of the West!" "The First Consul was but thirty-three," the English Cabinet was reminded; "he had, as yet, destroyed only States of the second order. Who knows how long it would take

him, if forced thereto, to change again the face of Europe!"

Under the alarm created by these acts and words, Great Britain suspended the evacuation of the colonies which, by the treaty, she was to surrender. New causes of quarrel arose. Under an old decree, passed in the maddest hour of the Revolution, every vessel under 100 tons burden carrying British goods which came within four leagues of the French coast was liable to forfeiture, and Bonaparte put this decree in active operation. British ships, even such as were driven by stress of weather into French ports, were, on the strength of this decree, seized. One British ship at Charente was confiscated because the plates and knives on its captain's table were proved to be of British manufacture. A practical blockade against British goods was maintained under the so-called peace. Bonaparte, too, despatched a considerable number of what he called "commercial agents" to Great Britain, and these proceeded to collect information, much more of a military than a commercial character, as to British ports and roads and arsenals. On January 3, 1802, there appeared in the *Moniteur* a report on Egypt by General Sebastiani, which was really an elaborate dissertation on the best plan for the reconquest of that country, and seemed to show that the First Consul was meditating a new expedition to the East.

All this fretted English sensibilities; but Bonaparte,

on his side, had grievances. To give up Malta was practically to abandon the Mediterranean, and England hesitated to make that great surrender when the political sky was black with fast-gathering war-clouds. This circumstance naturally kindled the First Consul's keenest wrath. He "would rather see the English," he said, "at Montmartre than at Malta." Bonaparte, again, was curiously sensitive to literary attack. Printers' ink burned him as with acid; jest stung him like a gadfly. Some French journals published in London were accustomed to expend some very French rhetoric on his doings. Bonaparte had neither the wisdom to leave these attacks unread nor the magnanimity to ignore them. He demanded from the British Government that these guilty journals should be suppressed, and their editors dismissed to some healthful occupation inside prison walls. The *Moniteur* of November 1, 1802, declared "that every line printed by the English Ministerial journals is a line of blood!"

Now Bonaparte expected the British Government to apply to English journalists who criticised his acts the agreeable methods he employed on French editors; and this, unfortunately, neither the provisions of the British law, nor the temper of the British people, would allow. Bonaparte smiled at such an idle excuse. He demanded, "in the name of the law of nations!" the suppression of English journals who dared to expend a few drops of

satiric ink upon him. Bonaparte, of course, never understood England, or its politics, or its newspapers. He believed the English Government was lost on the evidence of a leading article in the *Morning Chronicle*; and he could not understand why the English Cabinet should not suppress wicked editors by the same methods employed to subdue riotous mobs. Bonaparte, again, was affronted at the hospitality which, then as now, Great Britain accorded to men of every race who were not criminals. The Bourbon princes and the French emigrants generally, the First Consul announced, must be driven out of Great Britain.

On both sides of the Channel the clamour of contending voices grew ever shriller. The *Moniteur* in every new issue described England as a "nation of shopkeepers turned filibusters," "the patron and refuge of assassins." The irritability of Bonaparte grew intense. It ran like a flame through all his actions. He was consumed with feverish activity. His nerves knew no rest. Here is a picture of the First Consul at this period, drawn by the vivid, though perhaps not too friendly, pen of Lanfrey:—"An absolute need of activity, without pause and without respite, haunted him day and night. It woke him with a start in the middle of his sleep. It was henceforth the most striking trait of his nature, and became a danger for him from the character of precipitation that it imparted to all his

works, and by the multiplicity of adventures into which it drew him. These were the symptoms of the mania of a man of genius, but it was a fierce and incurable mania, so much the more terrible that nothing could divert him from it; for Bonaparte had little taste for pleasure, even for intellectual pleasure. This alarming disposition was fed by a prodigious power of work, and by a rapidity of conception that no other man has probably ever possessed to the same extent."

At this juncture a history-making conversation with the English ambassador, Lord Whitworth, took place. Bonaparte invited him on the evening of February 18 to an interview at the Tuileries, and talked incessantly to him for two hours. He dwelt on the non-evacuation of Malta and on the wickedness of English journalists. "Every wind that blew from England," he complained, "brought nothing but enmity." If only England would join him in the government of the world, how much both Powers would gain! As to Piedmont and Switzerland, they were "mere bagatelles." England had lost all right to complain of them. If war came, he declared, he would invade England, and she could hope for no allies. As for himself, he claimed Malta, and would always claim it.

This conversation, duly reported by Lord Whitworth, did not soothe British feelings. Two days afterwards the *Moniteur* announced that the French

armies were to be strengthened; "500,000 men ought to be, and shall be, ready to avenge the cause of the Republic." "The Government," said the *Moniteur*, "asserts with just pride that England, single-handed, is unable to cope with France; and it could not hope to drag other nations into new leagues." The English Cabinet replied to this by a message to Parliament declaring it necessary to "adopt additional measures of precaution for the security of the nation." On March 13, at an audience in the Tuileries, a memorable scene occurred. Bonaparte, with every sign of passion, approached the English ambassador. "You are bent on war, then?" he said. "No," was the reply, "we are too sensible of the advantages of peace." "The English," cried the First Consul in a voice loud enough to be heard by the entire audience, "are bent on war. They do not respect treaties. But," he added, "if they are the first to draw the sword, I shall be the last to put it back into the scabbard." It may be imagined what far-running echoes these angry syllables awoke in England itself!

On April 26 the British ambassador presented his ultimatum, summed up in six points, one of which asserted the right, as a precaution and guarantee, to occupy Malta for ten years. Bonaparte was scarcely ready for war, and the firmness of the British Government was unexpected and disconcerting. He now declared Malta "a miserable rock," not worth

two great nations going to war about, but evaded a definite answer on all the points raised. On May 12 Lord Whitworth quitted Paris, on the 16th Great Britain declared war, and within four days Cornwallis, with ten ships of the line, appeared off Brest, and began the blockade of that port, while within a week Nelson was doing "sentry-go" in front of Toulon!

War betwixt the two nations was perhaps inevitable, but the guilt of provoking it, and provoking it for wholly inadequate causes, must lie on Bonaparte. The testimony of a French writer may be quoted on this point. Says Lanfrey: "In order to satisfy a petty rancour against obscure writers, whom the noble hospitality of the English nation protected, he alone had enkindled it [the war], in contempt of the advice of his counsellors, in contempt of the remembrance of all the evils that were not yet retrieved, in contempt of the will of the nation that was hungering for the benefits of peace. And in order to avenge this miserable affront, millions of men were going to fight for more than ten years, to tear each other to pieces, to die all kinds of deaths, upon all the continents, upon all the seas, at every hour of day and night, in the deserts, upon the mountains, in the snow, in flaming cities as in obscurest villages, from the Tagus to the Neva, from the Baltic to the Gulf of Taranto, in Spain, in Russia, and as far off as India! And

this war, that he began in order to force England to violate the laws of hospitality towards proscribed men, was to continue without respite till the day when, vanquished and proscribed in his turn, he would implore, without obtaining it, the hospitality that he had so insulted."

Bonaparte, it is to be noted, entered upon the war in a mood of curiously vehement wrath. The great defeat of his career—the failure in Egypt—was due to the English. His device of the Northern League had been destroyed by them. These "shopkeepers" divided the empire of the world with him. It affronted his pride that they should hold all the seas of the world in an ownership so absolute. He had told Lord Whitworth, in a burst of angry frankness, that he did not see how he could strike England; but he suddenly found under his hand the opportunity of striking a great many Englishmen and Englishwomen. There were some 10,000 English visitors, of both sexes and of all ages, in France when war came. They were, in the main, mere pleasure-takers, and Bonaparte turned them by a flourish of his pen into victims and prisoners. He issued a decree directing the arrest of all English between the ages of eighteen and sixty; they were seized and held as prisoners to the end of the war.

For twelve years this great army of civilians languished in French fortresses. Families were broken up, businesses wrecked, careers destroyed. "I said,"

Napoleon explained afterwards at St. Helena, "if you can detain my travellers at sea, where you can do what you like, I will detain yours on land, where I am equally powerful." Elsewhere he offered another explanation of this act. "He wished," he said, "to make the war, and the Cabinet which declared war, hateful to the English upper classes;" and he seized the English in France because he knew that they chiefly belonged to those classes. But the deed really hardened the stubborn British determination to fight, to their last coin and their last cartridge, with the power capable of such an act.

Bonaparte employed great art in rousing public opinion in France against England. The *Moniteur* never wearied in proclaiming the treachery, the greed, and the guilty designs of that power. Bonaparte himself undertook a state journey through the maritime provinces of France to kindle their zeal against its great maritime foe. Town after town welcomed him with more than royal honours, and the speeches of the First Consul proclaimed in very shrill rhetoric the coming triumph of France over its ancient enemy. At Amiens Bonaparte entered the town under an arch inscribed "Chemin de l'Angleterre." "It was," says Lanfrey, "in reality the road that Bonaparte had just taken by declaring this fatal war—a road that he was never more to quit. This road, which he continued to follow,

without knowing it, when he entered Vienna, Berlin, and Moscow as a conqueror, was to be longer than he expected, and to be celebrated by innumerable prodigies; but at the extremity of the triumphal avenue, if his eye had been able to pierce the darkness of the future, he would have perceived with dismay—not the victory that he dreamed of, but the *Bellerophon* motionless and waiting for its guest.”

The war with England had one unforeseen effect. It transformed into an imperial crown the consular wreath of Bonaparte himself. On May 18, 1804, a decree of the Senate conferred the title of Emperor on Bonaparte, who was henceforth to be known as Napoleon. By the satire of history, only three days before Moreau had been put on his trial for the crime of attempting to restore royalism in France! The change of title had no significance as far as the war with England was concerned. The Emperor could not enjoy more absolute power than the First Consul had exercised. But from this point in the story the name “Bonaparte” disappears. The great protagonist of England is “Napoleon.”

CHAPTER X

THE BOULOGNE FLOTILLA

NAPOLEON had one huge advantage, and one distressing limitation, in the new struggle with England. The sea was shut against him. His authority ended wherever the sea-tides ran; the strength of all his battalions melted into vapour wherever the sea-winds blew. But on the land he was supreme. Every State in Europe was either his dependant or his ally, and Napoleon turned his alliances to very practical use. A leading item in the French budgets of the period was entitled "Foreign Receipts," an ingenious periphrase for the ransom exacted from the allies of France; and, in addition, there were subsidies which were paid and received, but which appeared in no public document. The gratitude of the States on which Napoleon conferred the disquieting advantage of his "protection" must be expressed in gold.

From Spain, Portugal, Holland, Genoa, Hanover, and the Italian Republics Napoleon wrung subsidies amounting to 100,000,000 francs yearly. He exacted from his allies, indeed, aid more precious than gold.

Genoa, for example, was required to supply 4000 sailors; Holland to furnish five line-of-battle ships, five frigates, and 100 gunboats; Switzerland, a contingent of 28,000 men, &c. All Napoleon's allies, in short, were compelled to pay ransom in troops or in money, and the system expanded until, in the later stages of the war, all Europe was tributary, and the hosts that marched under the standards of France were as many-tongued and as many-tinted as the multitudinous rabble of an Eastern potentate.

England thus had to oppose the strength, not of one nation, but of twenty. The different methods adopted towards their allies by France and England respectively are best expressed in terms of finance. England was the paymaster of the Continent, Napoleon its plunderer. England spoon-fed her allies with gold; Napoleon stripped them alike of cash and of troops. Succeeding generations of Englishmen have sighed at the subsidies which Pitt and his successors lavished on the Continent; but they might have blushed if England, like Napoleon, had wrung sums so vast, or even vaster, from its allies. It may be possible to doubt which was the wiser policy of the two, but as to which was the more generous there can be no question.

It was the difficulty of Napoleon, again, that in a war with England he had to fight on a new and strange element, and he himself never mastered even the alphabet of sea-warfare. He could not

understand why a line of battle-ships should not manœuvre like a column of infantry, or fleets move on the windy floor of the Atlantic with the precision of cavalry brigades on an open plain. Napoleon's genius for war underwent a curious paralysis when it was applied to things maritime, and a sort of unconfessed sense of this made him extremely impatient. He incessantly changed his sea-plans. Instead of solving difficulties, he simply denied their existence. "He blamed men," says Lanfrey, "for the defect of things;" he overwhelmed with reproaches and accusations naval experts who opposed their knowledge to his ignorance.

English sea-successes curiously puzzled Napoleon. "I can see no sufficient cause," he told Maitland long afterwards, "why your ships should beat the French with so much ease. The finest men-of-war in your service are French, and a French ship is heavier in every respect than one of yours; she carries more guns, those guns of larger calibre, and has a great many more men." Napoleon did not understand that the difference lay largely in the man behind the gun. The disciplined silence of a British ship, however, greatly impressed him. "On a French ship," he said contemptuously, "they gabble like so many geese."

The story of the Boulogne flotilla illustrates Napoleon's limitations as a naval strategist. For four years—from July 1801 to August 1805—he

cherished the hope of carrying a great invading army across the Channel in a swarm of light boats; and on this scheme he lavished a mental energy, a wealth of treasure and of toil, which was almost pathetic. The scheme, as it first took shape, was of comparatively modest dimensions. On July 12, 1801, nine divisions of gunboats were gathered at Boulogne and the neighbouring ports, with some 40,000 troops, including a considerable strength of artillery. The best sea-officer France possessed, La Touche Treville, was appointed commander of the flotilla. Some chance—of a fog, or of a starless, unbreathing night—was to be seized. The flotilla was to steal ghost-like across the Channel, and astonished England would wake to find a French army trudging through the Kentish lanes on its road to London.

The magical good fortune which seemed to attend all Napoleon's plans clad this new design against Great Britain with strange terrors. All England was alarmed. Every village drilled its militia, every hill-top carried its beacon, and the news that the French had landed was to be flashed in fire-signals through the three kingdoms. Well-to-do people gave up their houses in seaside towns, since the French might at any moment offer themselves as lodgers.

The British Cabinet put Nelson in charge of the Channel defences. He hoisted his flag on the *Medusa*, a 32-gun frigate, and had under his flag some thirty light frigates, gunboats, mortar-

vessels, &c. It was Channel weather and a Channel sea. Nelson suffered from cold, from every form of nervous distress, and from perpetual sea-sickness; yet his watch over Boulogne was tireless, and his clear brain quickly realised that there was no real peril behind the flotilla in that port. "This boat business," he wrote, "may be part of a great plan of invasion, but can never be the only one." He found that Augereau was in command of the great mass of the invading force at Ostend, apparently ready to embark. "I hope," was Nelson's comment, "to let him feel the bottom of the Goodwin Sands."

The sea, however, has strange chances. A breeze which, blowing from the French coast, enabled the flotilla to run across the Channel, might at the same moment drive the British ships out of the Channel. Or on some calm night the sliding Channel tides might carry the blockading squadron off its cruising ground, and leave a clear track for the flotilla. In any case, it was well to teach the French that England was not disposed to wait inertly to be invaded. It would attack its invaders in their own waters. So Nelson submitted to the Admiralty on July 25, 1801, an elaborate "plan for the defence of the Thames." The French flotilla, he calculated, might row over in very calm weather in twelve hours, the Boulogne detachment of 250 small vessels carrying 20,000 men. Directly the French flotilla, however, put its nose outside its sheltering ports,

“all our vessels and boats appointed to watch them must get into the Channel and meet them as soon as possible.” If a breeze sprang up, “our ships,” said Nelson, “are to deal destruction. No delicacy can be observed on this great occasion.” And a British line-of-battle ship in a breeze, it is clear, would have borne to the French flotilla the relation a shark bears to a shoal of herring, or rather that of a hawk to a cluster of ducklings.

If it remained calm, however, and the English boats were not strong enough to meet the flotilla in mid-Channel, “the moment they begin to touch our shores, strong or weak, our flotilla of boats must attack.” This was the essence of Nelson’s plan. He repeats later in the same report, “Whatever plans may be adopted, the moment the enemy touch our coast, be it where it may, they are to be attacked by every man, afloat and ashore. This must be perfectly understood. Never fear the event!” The English boats, if they found themselves outnumbered by the French, were to hang on the rear of the French flotilla until the beach was reached. Then, no matter what disparity of numbers existed, they were to crash in on the French as they attempted to land. “The bows of our flotilla,” was Nelson’s explanation, “will be opposed to their unarmed sterns; and the courage of Britons will never, I believe, allow one Frenchman to leave the beach.”

The French, on their part, betrayed their sense

of the matchless audacity of British seamen by the preparations they made to defend their flotilla, even while lying in a French port. The boats were fastened by chains to each other; huge poles tipped with iron were thrust out in a sort of bristling fringe from their sides, to keep off the British boats. Each boat was swathed with lofty boarding-nettings, and was crowded with soldiers, with instructions to defend the boat as they would defend the head of a breach. The pier-head, and every point of vantage on the shore which commanded the flotilla, were occupied by great batteries. If a boat were carried by the British, it was instantly to be treated as an enemy, and smitten with an overwhelming gun-fire from every French battery and gun within reach.

Nelson, however, never had the chance of putting those gallant tactics to the proof. The French declined to come out of Boulogne and the neighbouring ports. They fenced themselves in, indeed, much more as if they dreaded receiving an attack than contemplated making one. Nelson prowled to and fro off these ports like a terrier outside a suspected rat-hole. "I only want," he wrote, "to catch that Bonaparte on the water!"

Since the French would not come out of their defences, Nelson proposed to pay them a visit. At half-past ten on the night of August 15, fifty-seven armed boats were clustered in four divisions round

the *Medusa*. Parker led one division, Somerville another, Cotgrave a third, and Jones a fourth. The boats were secured to each other by ropes, each division moving in two columns, and in perfect silence. Every feature of the plan was settled with all Nelson's characteristic attention to the minutest detail—the point which each division was to attack, the men in each boat furnished with axes with which to cut the cables of the Frenchmen, the special boats supplied with grapnels which were to tow them off, &c. The signal to start was a lantern shown over the side of the *Medusa* itself, the watchword was "Nelson," the answer, "Bronte." The plan of the attack in Nelson's handwriting still exists, with rough, singularly crude, but highly expressive diagrams.

Never was a more gallant expedition. Its leaders were young men, trained in Nelson's school. Nelson himself drew up the plan of their attack, and though his fragile body, one-armed, one-eyed, forbade him taking part in the adventure, yet his spirit throbbed in every boat. But the expedition failed, and failed signally. The boats moved off silently, each one carrying a cluster of daring spirits—black sea beneath, black sky above, the waiting enemy ahead. But the strong Channel tides, with the curves of a whirlpool and the rush of a mill-stream, almost instantly broke the order of the moving boats. Somerville's division, which led, was swept by the current eastward of

Boulogne. Their leader ordered the boats to cast each other off, and each pulled, a struggling atom, against the tide, until, just before dawn broke, the leading boats reached the Boulogne pier-head. A dash was made on an armed brig lying there. It was carried, but was found to be fastened to the pier with a great chain, while from the pier itself, and from every French ship lying near, a converging fire was poured on the captured ship and its captors. The British clung desperately to their task, but at last were compelled to draw off, with seventy-three officers and men killed and wounded.

Parker's division had a happier fortune with the tides, and reached the point of attack a little after midnight. Nothing could exceed the resolution with which Parker and his men dashed at a large gun-brig, looming shapeless in the gloom, and carrying the French admiral's pennant. But the French were admirably prepared. A very strong netting stretched from the brig's bulwarks to its lower yards, behind the netting was drawn a line of 200 infantry, in addition to the crew of the brig itself. From behind the shelter of the net the French shot coolly and swiftly, and though the British attacked again and again with unsurpassed courage, they had to draw off with a loss of sixty-three killed and wounded, including Parker himself, whose wound was mortal. The third division showed equal daring, and suffered equal disaster; the fourth lost its way altogether.

The failure of the attack, and the slaughter which attended it, wrung Nelson's heart. Parker was to him as a son; he mourned for him as a father might have mourned, and he directed that a lock of Parker's hair should be buried with him when he died. Two of the *Medusa's* middies—gallant lads not sixteen years old—fell in the attack. One of them, while trying to board the enemy, received no less than five musket-balls in his body. The two heroic boys were laid in one grave at Deal; Nelson himself and eight of his captains stood by the grave, and those who watched saw the hot tears run down the wasted face of the greatest of British seamen.

The failure of the expedition, however, had its compensations. The French flotilla, attacked so fiercely within its own defences, was not in the least likely to venture out of them, for the purpose of invading England, and the alarm excited by the flotilla itself quickly died away.

CHAPTER XI

NEW PLANS

WHEN war was declared in 1802, after the truce of Amiens, Napoleon revived the scheme of the flotilla on a great scale, and with great seriousness. Fragments of the flotilla of 1801 remained, and Napoleon profited by its lessons. The new fleet was to be vastly larger in scale than that of 1801, large enough to transport an army of 150,000 men; and since no existing port was of sufficient capacity to hold such a flotilla, new ports had to be created. Boulogne, at the eastern entrance to the English Channel, is a tidal harbour in which boats at low tide lay stranded. A great basin, edged with quays, was excavated, in which 1000 gunboats could ride. Vimereux and Ambleteuse, to the north of Boulogne, Etaples to the south, in like manner were dredged, deepened, and armed, until whole flotillas could ride safely within them.

In the task of building the new flotilla practically all France united. Almost every commune gave its praam or its gunboat, every town its frigate, every department promised its ship of the line. Down

every French river came floating the tiny clusters of flat-bottomed craft to the coast, their numbers swelling as they passed each town.

More than 2000 of these flat-bottomed transports had to be built, and the task was great. The North Sea and Holland were made contributors; contingents came from the Rhine and the Scheldt, as well as from the Loire and the Seine. When they reached the coast, the flotillas had to creep along the curving edge of the shore to the harbours near Boulogne, and this business was made difficult by the audacity and enterprise of the British ships. The Channel was patrolled by frigates and lighter vessels with great vigilance, and as the clusters of many-oared transports crept along the French shore, the British would dash fiercely in upon them like wolves on some flock of sheep.

Napoleon fringed the whole French coast with sea-batteries, and patrolled it with troops of field-artillery to shelter his slowly gathering swarms of transports. When attacked, the French boats would run ashore, troops quickly gathered for their defence, and the hardy British seamen often fought hand to hand with French infantry on the beach in their eagerness to destroy the boats.

The flotilla included six types of vessels. The praam was a formidable craft, 110 feet long, 25 feet broad, armed with twelve long 24-pounders, and carrying 100 soldiers, with stalls for 50 horses.

There were three types of flat-bottomed boats; the first carried from 150 to 250 men, the second from 80 to 100, the third from 40 to 50. The boats in each class were armed with one or two heavy guns, and were thus an odd combination of gunboats and pontoons. The gun-vessels were really brigs or schooners; a lighter variety were called *peniches*. Some idea of the scale of Napoleon's preparations may be gathered from the fact that his flotilla numbered some 2300 vessels, and was capable of transporting 160,000 troops with 9000 horses.

On the hills above Boulogne was gathered an army of 130,000 soldiers, veterans from Italy, the Rhine, and Egypt, the victors of Marengo and Hohenlinden. The camp for the Grand Army, which the flotilla was to bear to the shores of England, was really a great town, with streets and squares and barraeks—or huts—substantially built, and on a uniform plan, chequered with gardens. The flotilla was organised so as to be a sort of marine reflex of the structure of the army itself; every division of the army had a corresponding division of the flotilla assigned to it, every regiment its cluster of boats; and so perfect was the organisation that every private in the army knew exactly, not only in which boat he was to embark, but what place in the boat he was to take. A corps of 25,000 men, it was declared, could be embarked in ten minutes.

In fighting quality the troops waiting to cross the

Channel, and march on London, probably equalled Cæsar's Tenth Legion or Craufurd's Light Division in the Peninsula. There were the veterans of the Republic, hardened by many campaigns, and fired with the lust for conquest and for booty which the Empire represented. For more than two years that mighty and disciplined host lay encamped about Boulogne. Its regiments were drilled in embarking and disembarking, till the whole process could be counted in minutes. Before them ran the ribbon of grey sea; beyond, through forty miles of sea-air, they could see the white cliffs of the threatened island, now dim through haze, now bright in sunshine. England lay in plain sight, "compassed with the inviolate sea;" but "the inviolate sea" here was only a watery thread. And scattered along twenty miles of French coast were the thousands of praams and transports which the genius and energy of Napoleon had gathered, to carry what seemed an irresistible host across the watery ditch that parted it from England.

Napoleon himself was confident of success, or at least affected to be confident. He only asked twelve hours of calm, a friendly veil of drifting mist, and England would be reached, the green fields of Kent would be reddened with blood, and the smoke of burning London would blacken the skies! A medal was actually struck to commemorate this, as yet, unachieved victory. On one side is the laurelled

head of Napoleon himself, on the reverse is the image of Hercules crushing in his arms the giant Antæus; it bears as its motto the words "Descente en Angleterre," beneath is the lying record, "Frappée à Londres en 1804." The irony of events, however, is apt to be severe on prophetic medals.

This pomp of menacing preparation, of course, kindled the stubborn English temper. Across the three kingdoms there ran a flame of patriotic fire. The militia was already 80,000 strong, and the regular forces 130,000; but in addition, a bill was carried authorising, in case of actual invasion, a levy *en masse* of all males betwixt seventeen and fifty-five years of age. This was, of course, the conscription; but pending actual invasion, volunteer regiments were raised, and so deeply was the popular spirit roused, that in a few weeks this new force numbered 300,000 men, and the scheme for a conscription became unnecessary.

Lord Cockburn, in his "Memorials of my Time," gives an amusing sketch of the forms into which the warlike feeling of the period crystallised itself. "In Edinburgh," he says, "we all became soldiers, one way or another. Professors wheeled in the College area; side-arms peeped from behind the gown at the bar." Brougham served at the same gun in a company of artillery with Playfair; Lord Moncreiff and James Grahame—the author of "The Sabbath"—were in the same squad of riflemen. Francis Horner

walked about the streets with a musket, being a private in the Gentlemen's Regiment. Thomas Brown, the moralist, Jeffrey the reviewer, and many another were full privates in the same regiment. Walter Scott belonged to a troop of Yeomanry Cavalry, and used to practise with a sabre at a turnip stuck on the point of a staff, and representing a Frenchman's head; and as he leaned forward to slice the unoffending tuber he would exclaim, "Cut them down, the villains! cut them down!"

"Thinking men," says Lord Cockburn, "were in a great and genuine fright. The apparent magic of Napoleon's Continental success confounded them. Ireland made them shudder." An able-bodied man of any rank who was not a volunteer or a militiaman had to explain, or apologise for, his singularity; and that state of things must be multiplied over the whole area of Great Britain to fairly represent the national mood of the time. Thus the three kingdoms became suddenly, in a sense, a camp; the nation took the menacing aspect of an army.

But the great flotilla was, in fact, a stupendous blunder, of which not merely no sailor, but nobody with any adequate sense of the conditions of sea-transport, could have been guilty. These swarms of tiny craft, shallow, flat-bottomed, more like saucers than ships, proved from the very outset very unmanageable. Many of them declined to steer; some of them to float; most of them included every vice

possible to a ship. Many were disabled almost before they were used. The Channel, with its uncertain weather, its furious tides, its angry choppy seas, formed a singularly unfavourable field for the evolutions of such a swarm of drifting and helpless cock-boats. It was quickly found, for example, that no one tide would be sufficient to enable this multitudinous flock of boats to get clear of the ports in which it lay. If, say, 1000 tiny transports, carrying 75,000 men, crept out into the open Channel, they must wait some twelve hours before the returning tide made it possible for the other half of the flotilla to join them.

Now 75,000 Frenchmen tossing in the Channel in flat-bottomed transports for twelve hours, would probably be seasick to a man. Valour, discipline, thirst of glory, and love of "La Belle France" would all temporarily be jettisoned in the throes of *mal de mer*. That long pause until the entire flotilla succeeded in disentangling itself from its twenty miles of harbours would, of course, bring with it many perilous chances. The weather might change, a fierce gale romp across the Straits, and that half of the flotilla which had reached the open water would, in that event, go flying down the Channel like so many chips down a millrace.

The signal that the flotilla was creeping out would, again, bring every British ship—huge seventy-fours, eager frigates, angry gunboats—crowding to the spot.

The sliding, uncertain tides of the Channel, its gusty winds, would certainly sweep the huge, crowded, many-oared flotilla into strange shapes, and in quite unexpected directions. And what would happen if an entire French army, all seasick, were caught in mid-channel and in open boats, by a few British seventy-fours, can be better imagined than described.

The British Channel squadron, it need not be added, seized every opportunity of worrying the flotilla. Its gathering detachments, as they crept anxiously along the shores, were exposed to incessant attacks. No gunboat could put its nose outside Boulogne or Ambleteuse without finding a British frigate, or a couple of British gunbrigs, anxiously waiting to interview it. When the nights were particularly black and tempestuous fireships were sent drifting into the ports; some amusingly crude explosion vessels, too, were expended on the flotilla. Thus French nerves were kept on the stretch, in a manner highly disconcerting to the Frenchmen themselves, though it may be suspected the British sailors, on the whole, enjoyed the process.

The defects of the flotilla found a dramatic illustration at a very dramatic moment. On August 16, 1804, Napoleon celebrated his birthday by a grand military function at Boulogne itself. Eighty thousand troops defiled before him as he sat on a sort of throne; there was a great distribution of crosses of the Legion of Honour; a thousand military bands

filled the air with music, and from every headland within twenty miles rolled the voice of cannon. A division of the flotilla was to take part in the pageant, and at four o'clock the leading boats were creeping round the nearest headland. Napoleon watched the regular lines of transports as, urged by a thousand oars, they wheeled into the field of his vision. These boats were the bridge by which his battalions were to cross the unfriendly Channel and fling themselves on the much-hated islanders.

But while Napoleon and all his brilliant soldiery watched the flotilla, a Channel gale swept over the water, ruffling it into anger. A heavy sea rose. The boats of the flotilla were swept helplessly away, and not a few of them broke up in the white surf and their crews perished. A few days later—on August 26—some divisions of the flotilla were manœuvring betwixt Vimereux and Ambleteuse; Napoleon—this time actually afloat in his barge, in company with Soult and Mortier and Admiral Bruix—was watching the evolutions. Suddenly a British frigate, the *Immortalité*, a couple of gunbrigs, and a cutter came round a jutting point, bore down promptly upon the flotilla, and opened a brisk fire. The French gunboats suffered much damage, and crept near the shore so as to have the help of the heavy batteries. But all this was singularly disconcerting! Here was a British frigate, with two brigs and a cutter, attacking three whole divisions of the flotilla under the shelter

of the French batteries, and with Napoleon himself looking on! Some of the French boats were so injured that they had to be beached in order to save their crews. The British cutter, a tiny craft not much bigger than a fishing-smack, was struck by a French shell and sunk; but the other ships, having satisfactorily flurried the flotilla, drew off.

The two characteristic risks of the flotilla—in a word, its utter helplessness in rough weather, and its liability to instant, haughty, and overwhelming attack by the British ships that kept guard in the Channel—were thus witnessed by Napoleon himself. Up to this point he had, incredible as it may seem, cherished the belief that, in spite of the command of the sea by the British, he could, so to speak, smuggle a whole army, horse, foot, and artillery, across the Channel. He believed this in spite of the warnings of his own admirals and the protest of his own cooler judgment. His vehement hate of England had temporarily clouded his usually crystalline intellect.

But he now began to realise that an invasion of England under these conditions was impossible. His flotilla could only cross the narrow seas under the shelter of a friendly line of battle-ships. He must, somehow, secure the command of the Channel, if only—as he afterwards said—“for six hours,” in order to carry out his great purpose. So there arose in the chambers of his brain the plan of those great

naval combinations which form the history of the next twelve months—combinations which the tireless blockades of the British fleets were to hamper, and which Nelson was finally to shatter at Trafalgar.

Of all the 2000 praams, gunboats, and transports which were gathered in Boulogne and the sister ports, not one ever attempted to reach the coast of England. The great army, encamped for more than two years on the hills round Boulogne, marched at last on quite another quest—to Austerlitz, to Jena, to Friedland, to the flames of Moscow and the snows of the Great Retreat.

Brenton records that as the French troops turned their backs on the Channel, an officer paused to look on the crowded and useless flotilla lying in the artificial ports created for it, and said, "We have gone to all this tremendous expense for no other purpose than to frighten our soldiers;" to prove, that is, how helpless against the sea-power of England was the military strength of France. The Boulogne flotilla, like the expedition to Egypt and the Armed Neutrality League, represented a design that had failed. The sand crept over the artificial harbours Napoleon had created. The boats of the flotilla rotted at their anchorage. The mud-huts that formed the camp of the "Army of England" dissolved in the rains of successive winters; and the Great Flotilla to-day is remembered only to awaken a smile.

CHAPTER XII

THE GREAT BLOCKADES

IT is still vehemently disputed whether Napoleon seriously hoped to reach England by direct invasion, and to carry the Grand Army across the Straits in the flotilla he had prepared. The experts are equally positive on both sides of the question. Professor Sloane, for example, holds that everything about the flotilla—the artificial ports, the 2000 praams and transports, the camp of the great host on the hills, the long months of waiting, the thousand trial-embarkations, &c.—all the preparations, in a word, which filled two costly and toilsome years, were but “the dust behind which Napoleon was manœuvring.” He was, in truth, aiming at Vienna and Berlin when pretending to strike at London. He never really hoped to overthrow England except by first conquering the Continent.

Professor Sloane has, no doubt, some good authorities on his side, including Napoleon himself. Metternich, for example, always believed that the Grand Army was meant to cross the Rhine, not the Straits of Dover. It is possible to quote Napoleon himself

in support of this theory: "Never would I have been such a fool," he told Metternich in 1810, "as to make a descent upon England, unless, indeed, a revolution had taken place in that country. The army assembled in Boulogne was always an army against Austria." He collected his army at Boulogne, Napoleon went on to explain, because incidentally it disquieted England; "but," he added, with a bantering smile, to Metternich, "you saw in 1805 how near Boulogne was to Vienna."

Napoleon, however, is about the most unreliable authority on his own plans it is possible to quote. He is the most heroic and persistent liar known to history, and it is nearly always possible to disprove what he says to somebody on one day, by some equally positive assertion made to somebody else the day afterwards. Napoleon was, no doubt, capable of practising a strategic ruse on a stupendous scale, for some adequate end, for history records no other great soldier who was also so great a *poseur*. But there was no adequate motive for the stupendous and costly deception, stretching through years, with which Professor Sloane credits Napoleon in connection with the Boulogne flotilla. His enemies were not so powerful, nor his end so remote, that the design of attacking them, and of reaching it, should be concealed for so long and by a method so costly.

But there yet remains the puzzle as to whether

Napoleon at any time seriously hoped to reach England with the flotilla alone, and without first securing the command of the Channel by some great naval combination. Here, again, we have Napoleon's own explanation of his intentions. In September 1805, just when the flotilla scheme was abandoned, and the march which led to Austerlitz was beginning, Napoleon wrote a memorandum headed, "What was my design in the creation of the flotilla at Boulogne?" He answers his own question thus: "I wished to assemble forty or fifty ships of the line in the harbour of Martinique, by operations combined in the harbours of Toulon, Cadiz, Ferrol, and Brest; to bring them suddenly back to Boulogne; to find myself in this way, during fifteen days, the master of the sea; to have 150,000 men encamped on the coast, 3000 or 4000 vessels in the flotilla, and to set sail the moment the signal was given of the arrival of the combined fleet. That project has failed." And that unhappy Villeneuve, Napoleon goes on to explain, was the guilty cause of the failure. If he had not blundered, "my army," says Napoleon, "would have embarked, and it was all over with England."

It will be seen that this explanation in 1805 blankly contradicts that supplied to Metternich in 1810; and the reason of the earlier note is clear. The Boulogne flotilla was a huge failure, and Napoleon never acknowledged a failure. He had

to "explain" it, so that it should seem to be a success, or at least that the blame should lie on some other shoulders than his own. The note of September 1805 was intended to deceive history, and to save Napoleon's fame at the expense of that of Villeneuve.

Thiers, Lanfrey, and Mahan—three writers of very diverse type—agree in declaring that Napoleon's correspondence during the two and a half years betwixt May 1803 and October 1805 proves beyond doubt that the flotilla was no mere mask, hiding from the world the intention to attack Austria. Napoleon seriously proposed to invade England by its means; and, during the first stages at least, he hoped to do it without the help of his fleets. "To cross an arm of the sea nearly forty miles wide, in the face of a foe whose control of the sea was for the most part undisputed," says Mahan, "was an undertaking so bold that men still doubt whether Napoleon meant it; but assuredly he did."

Meneval, Napoleon's private secretary, whose hand had transcribed thousands of letters and orders bearing on the English invasion, bears emphatic testimony to the seriousness of the Emperor's designs. "Many imagine," he says, "that the imminence of a Continental war must have made Napoleon give up all idea of absenting himself from the Continent with his best army. But, as a matter of fact, never was there more earnest or sincerer

planning." "Napoleon," he explains, "expected the overthrow of England to be a mere three months' business. The first victory would have opened the road to London. Communications established in Ireland and Scotland, and a general uprising against the privileged classes of the English lords would have done the rest."

Napoleon, in a word, pictured himself entering London as a sort of French version of William of Orange; only, as he put it, "with more generosity and disinterestedness" than that cold-blooded Dutchman ever possessed! He seriously believed there would be a popular rising in his behalf. Napoleon's brain was haunted with many strange visions, but surely with none stranger than this—the subjugation of Great Britain in three months, and a general uprising of the inhabitants in aid of a French invasion, for the sake of destroying the "tyranny" of the House of Lords!

Later, indeed, Bonaparte persuaded himself that, by force of geography and by the plain intentions of Divine Providence, England was designed to become a mere joint in the tail of France! "England," he told Las Cases at St. Helena, "is naturally meant to be an appendage to France. Nature made her just as much one of our islands as Corsica or Oleron." In unscientific contempt of geography, however, and in wicked scorn of the plain intentions of Divine Providence as interpreted by Napoleon, England has

stubbornly declined to become "an appendage of France."

The naval combinations to secure the command of the Channel were really an afterthought on the part of Napoleon. He himself, in 1797, when appointed commander of the "Army of England," told the Directory that to invade England without first securing the command of the sea would be a task too perilous to be attempted. But in 1803 his hate of England was more violent, his trust in his "star" was more complete, and, above all, he was the absolute master of France! So, for a while, he persuaded himself that what was impossible to France under the Directory of 1795 was possible to France under himself in 1803.

But an intellect on the whole so sane and so piercing as that of Napoleon could not long be blinded, even by hate. To commit the Grand Army to the Channel tides in flat-bottomed transports, without the shelter of friendly fleets, Napoleon recognised would be madness. He had seen at Boulogne the helplessness of his transports in rough weather, and the audacity of British ships and captains. "He now began," says Lanfrey, "to understand the insufficiency of the flotilla when reduced to its own strength, and decided on ensuring the co-operation of our squadrons;" and a letter written by him to Gantheaume on December 7, 1803, contains the earliest germ of the plan for the great naval combina-

tions which followed. For the next eighteen months, Napoleon was playing, so to speak, a game of stupendous chess against England, with the tossing sea for board, and mighty fleets for pawns and knights and castles.

In this strategic battle Napoleon ought to have won. No more subtle or profound intellect was ever applied to the business of war than his. Strategy, too, was the field in which Napoleon most excelled. To his brooding and luminous brain the most complex and far-reaching combinations were simple. And he had opposed to him only a cluster of plain-minded British sailors, who knew their own sea-going business perfectly well, but who made no pretensions to understand the subtleties of military strategy. They had not mastered its grammar; they could not even talk its language!

Yet St. Vincent and Barham at the Admiralty, Nelson and Cornwallis and Collingwood off Toulon and Brest and Cadiz, somehow, read Napoleon's profoundest combinations, and shattered them by an art that was perhaps simpler than his, but which was also swifter and more direct. They out-planned and out-manœuvred, in a word, as well as out-fought, this greatest captain of all time. The sea-struggle of 1803-5 "has an interest wholly unique," says Mahan, "as the only great naval campaign ever planned by this foremost captain of modern times." And it ended at Trafalgar!



LORD BARHAM

From an engraving after a drawing by J. DOWNMAN

At the moment when Napoleon realised that his flotilla, unaided, could not cross the Channel, France possessed a fleet which, judged by mere number of ships, was of great power. But Napoleon had sacrificed his fleet to his flotilla. He had starved his line-of-battle ships to build flat-bottomed transports. Villeneuve summed up the condition of the French fleet in the words, "We have bad masts, bad sails, bad rigging, bad officers, and bad sailors." All the resources of French dockyards had been expended on the flotilla and denied to the fleet. Still, there were over forty-five line-of-battle ships under the French flag.

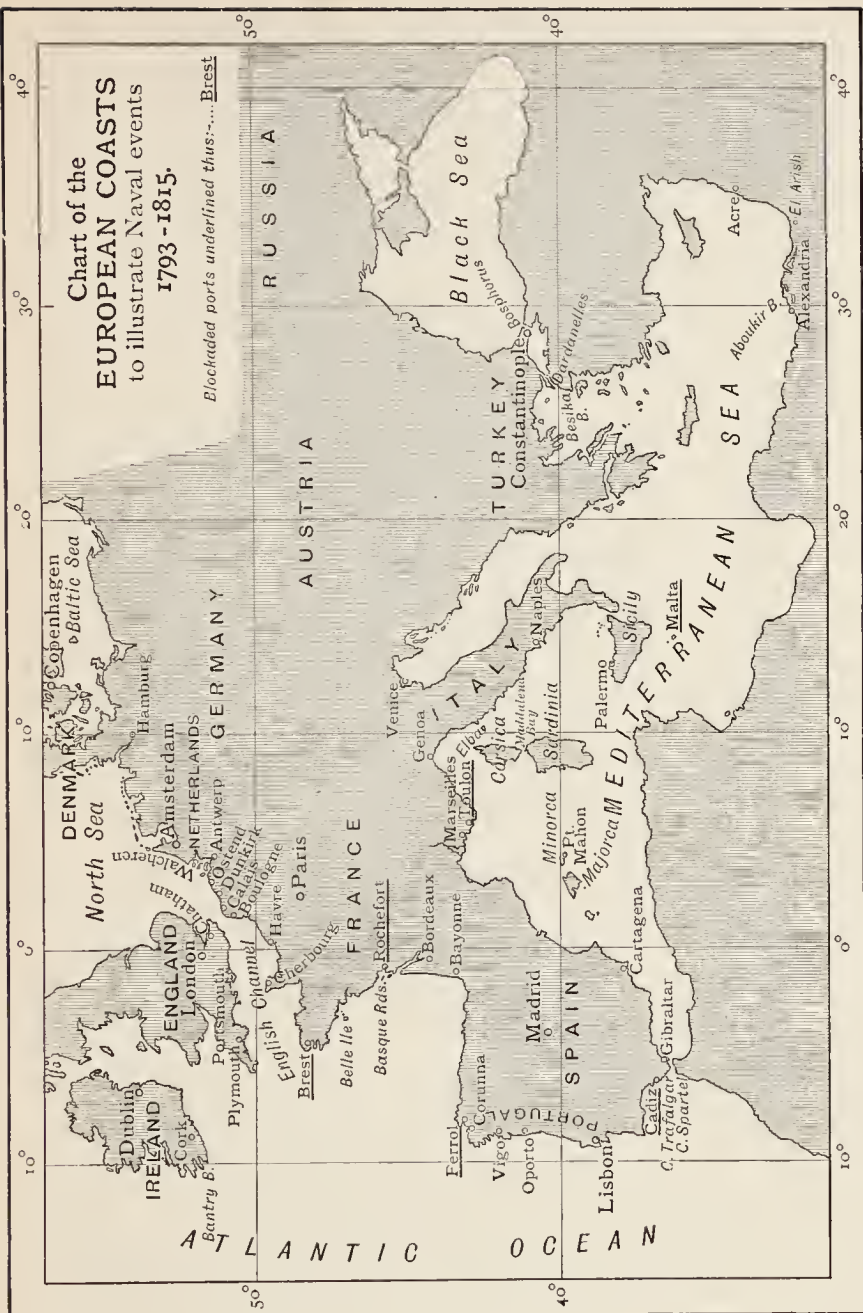
St. Vincent, on the other hand, had enormously reduced the strength of the British fleet by unwise economies during the truce of Amiens. The British dockyards were disorganised, the shipyards dismantled, the supply of naval stores almost exhausted, and there were ten line-of-battle ships less than when the war began. Under Lord Melville, however, extraordinary energy was infused into naval administration, and during 1804 no less than eighty-seven ships of war were built and launched. And yet at the beginning of 1805, when the alliance with Spain put under the command of Napoleon some seventy sail of the line, Britain could only put eighty-three ships of an equal class into active commission. The disparity in naval force betwixt the two contending Powers was thus comparatively small.

The French fleet, however, was scattered in half-a-dozen ports, and over each port a British squadron kept tireless and unslumbering guard. "Our first line of defence," as Nelson put it, "is close to the enemy's ports." The enemy's fleet was helpless when each fragment of it—at Brest, at Rochefort, at Toulon, or at Dunkirk—was kept hermetically sealed up by sleepless blockade. The general plan of Napoleon was that one squadron should, somehow, break loose, draw off in pursuit the British squadron watching it, then double back to the French coast, raise the other blockades in turn, and thus, gathering strength as it went, at last appear a great fleet of thirty-five or forty ships of the line in the Channel. "Let us," said Napoleon, "be masters of the Straits for six hours, and we shall be masters of the world." And all the combinations and blockades, the flights and the pursuits, the evasions and the battles of more than two years eddied round the problem of gaining those "six hours," or of preventing them being gained.

Nothing could surpass, nothing in sea-warfare has ever equalled, for vigilance, for endurance, for inflexibility of purpose, the British blockades. Cornwallis kept guard over Brest, on the stormy western angle of France, for nearly two and a half years, through all weathers and all seasons. Ships came and went, but still the French lookouts, gazing seaward, saw always the same sight—the English frigates, like

Chart of the EUROPEAN COASTS to illustrate Naval events 1793-1815.

Blockaded ports underlined thus:....Brest



watchdogs, tacking to and fro across the Passage de l'Iroise, while farther out, towards the stormy cliffs at Ushant, were the topsails of the line-of-battle ships under the flag of Cornwallis. Sometimes the furious western gales would blow the British ships beyond the horizon, but with the falling wind they crept back again. Collingwood off Rochefort, or later off Cadiz, showed a constancy as heroic. One stretch of cruising lasted for twenty months, during which he never dropped anchor. In a letter to his wife he records that he "has not seen a green leaf on a tree for fourteen months."

Nelson had a still stormier post. He kept guard in the Gulf of Lyons off Toulon. His method of blockading was characteristic. He desired rather to tempt the enemy's ships out of port than to keep them shut up in it. "Every opportunity," he wrote, "has been offered to the enemy to put to sea, for it is there we hope to realise the hopes and expectations of our country." La Touche-Treville commanded a fleet of twelve line-of-battle ships in Toulon. Outside the port nothing was visible but a single British frigate, lazily crossing to and fro—like a hawk circling idly in fields of soft air—as though to serve as a decoy to the Frenchmen.

But beyond the sea-line was Nelson's fleet, scattered over an enormous stretch of sea-space. His line-of-battle ships patrolled the whole interval betwixt the Spanish coast, as far south as the Balearic Isles, to

Sardinia and Corsica. This great field was divided by Nelson into sections, each bearing a different number. At one fixed spot a frigate was always kept with the intelligence of Nelson's whereabouts. All news was carried to this, the central rendezvous. The great ships were, meanwhile, moving from point to point over the cruising ground, but all connected, as though by an electrical thread, with each other and with their chief. Thus the scattered ships could crystallise into a solid fleet the moment the news was flashed along any line of communication that the Frenchmen were out.

Nelson's outlying ships, when the French showed signs of putting to sea, would fall back as a lure, and La Touche chose to misunderstand this. He published a letter in which he described himself as having "chased Nelson, who ran before him." "If my character for not running away," wrote Nelson, "is not fixed by this time, it is not worth my trouble to put the world right." Nevertheless, the Frenchman's lie stung Nelson. "I have kept M. La Touche's letter," he writes, "and if I ever take him I shall never see him, or, if I do, I shall make him *eat* his letter!"

For two years Nelson battled with the wild north-westerners of the Gulf of Lyons, keeping watch over Toulon. He himself, from May 1803 to August 1805, left his ship only three times, and for less than an hour on each occasion.

On June 20, 1805, Nelson writes in his diary: "I went on shore for the first time since June 16, 1803, and from having my foot out of the *Victory*, two years wanting ten days." This meant patient and hardy seamanship of the finest quality. Nelson's ships were splendidly manned, but ill supplied. They were leaky, overstrained, with worn-out canvas and rigging, lacking almost everything, in fact, except hardy crews and gallant captains. But by the perfection of care and sea-nursing, Nelson kept his fleet in working order and clung to his post.

The French squadron once, at a moment when Nelson was blown off the coast, ran out of Toulon; but after three days struggled back again half-dismantled. "These gentlemen," was Nelson's comment, "are not accustomed to a Gulf of Lyons gale, which we have buffeted for twenty-one months and not carried away a spar."

It was one of the compensations of these great blockades that they raised the standard of seamanship and endurance throughout the British fleets to the highest possible level. The lonely watches, the sustained vigilance, the remoteness from all companionship, the long wrestle with the forces of the sea, the constant watching for battle, which for English seamen marked those blockades, profoundly affected the character of English seamanship. When, indeed, has the world seen such seamen as those of the years preceding Trafalgar?—hardy,

resolute, careless alike of tempest or of battle; of frames as enduring as the oaken decks they trod, and courage as iron as the guns they worked; and as familiar with sea-life and all its chances as though they had been web-footed.

If the great blockades hardened the seamanship of the British fleets, fighting for long months with the tempests of the open sea, they fatally enervated the seamanship of the French navy. The seaman's art under the tricolour decayed in the long inaction of blockaded ports. The seaman's spirit drooped. The French navy suffered a curious and fatal loss, not only of nautical skill but of fighting impulse.

These blockades, as a result, deflected Napoleon and determined the course of history. Cornwallis off Brest, and Nelson off Toulon, really held the great Boulogne flotilla imprisoned, and kept the fields of Kent in peace. "Those far-distant, storm-beaten ships," says Mahan, "upon which the Grand Army never looked, stood between it and the dominion of the world."

CHAPTER XIII

NAPOLEON'S SEA-STRATEGY

BUT the sea, with its vast spaces and wandering winds, has always strange chances, and Napoleon calculated on these for success. Toulon was usually the centre and starting-point of his combinations. If the French fleet once broke out and disappeared beyond the horizon, it might run either eastward to Egypt, or westward to the Straits of Gibraltar. Once through these Straits, again, it might run northwards to Ferrol, Brest, and the Channel, or south-west to the West Indies. And a blunder in judgment amongst this tangle of courses, on the part of the pursuing British fleet, would wreck the whole system of British blockades. It was upon this chance Napoleon calculated.

His earliest strategy may be briefly described. He gathered 20,000 troops in Brest, announcing a descent upon Ireland, and filled that port with preparations as though an immediate attempt to break the blockade were about to be made. British vigilance, Napoleon calculated, would be fixed on this point. But the real initiative was to be taken by the Toulon

squadron. It was to slip out with the first north-west wind, run eastward as long as a British ship was in sight, then double back, pass the Straits, and run northward along the coast of Spain. As it passed Rochefort it would brush aside the British ships on blockade duty there, add to its numbers the released French squadron, and bear up for the narrow seas. Nelson would thus be chasing shadows in the direction of Egypt, and Cornwallis keeping anxious guard against a non-existent army of invasion for Ireland, at the exact moment when La Touche-Treville, with sixteen sail of the line, would be convoying the great flotilla to the shores of Kent.

This plan was to take effect in January 1804; but it was postponed by one difficulty or another until it was finally wrecked by the death of La Touche-Treville himself, on August 20. "The French papers," wrote Nelson, "say he died of walking often up to the signal-post at Sepet to watch us. I always pronounced that would be his death."

Villeneuve hoisted his flag as successor of La Touche-Treville, and Napoleon, who, with the instinct of a great leader, adjusted his strategy to the character of his subordinates, changed his plan to suit the less adventurous spirit of his new admiral. The Brest squadron was now to be the starting-point. Gantheaume was to make his escape with twenty ships of the line, carrying 18,000 troops under Augereau; running far out into the Atlantic till he

had shaken off pursuit, he was then to double back, and throw Augereau and his army on the north of Ireland; then rounding the north of Scotland, make his appearance in the English Channel. To help this scheme the Toulon and Rochefort squadrons were to break out, meet at a given rendezvous in the West Indies, and proceed to destroy the English possessions there. "I think," wrote Napoleon, "that the sailing of these twenty ships of the line will oblige the English to despatch over thirty in pursuit. This will enormously weaken their strength in the Channel." It is difficult not to admire the scale and daring of this combination. The West Indies were to be destroyed, and England and Ireland simultaneously invaded.

The trouble, however, in so great a scheme was to set it in movement. Gantheaume must begin by evading Cornwallis, and that alert and hardy seaman declined to be evaded. Cornwallis was familiarly known in the vernacular of the forecastle as "Billy Blue," because he always hoisted the "Blue Peter"—the signal to make ready for sea—as soon as, blown off Brest, he anchored at Torbay. He was a plain, blunt, inarticulate seaman, who commanded fleets as the comrade of Jervis and of Nelson in the stormiest days of the Great War; yet he "never won a victory nor had the chance of winning one." He played, that is, a curiously unromantic part in an heroic history. But he was a great seaman, who, with no touch of



ADMIRAL CORNWALLIS

From an engraving by BARTOLOZZI



brilliancy, yet did the duty before him with something of the temper of one of Cromwell's Ironsides, and he is one of the great personal forces in the struggle with Napoleon.

While events lingered, a stroke of good fortune befell Napoleon and gave a new scale to his plans. The fleets of Spain fell into his hands. Spain was in alliance, offensive and defensive, with France, and was bound by treaty to aid the French with a fleet of fifteen line-of-battle ships and 40,000 troops. But Spain was, by force of geography, out of the field of Napoleon's operations, and he compounded for active military and naval assistance by an annual subsidy of £3,000,000. England naturally treated this as an act of war against herself. Gold is sometimes a more effective warlike contribution than steel or gunpowder. Napoleon, again, insisted that Spain should prepare and equip the French men-of-war lying in Spanish ports. The British Government required Spain to suspend all operations in her dockyards, and on October 5, 1804, took the strong step of intercepting the Spanish treasure-ships from America. The gold was meant for French pockets, and Great Britain held she had a right to prevent it reaching such a mischievous destination. She would hold the treasure in trust for Spain till more peaceable times came.

Four light British frigates accordingly intercepted the four Spanish treasure-frigates off Cape Santa Maria

on October 5. The British commodore sent a boat to the Spanish flagship saying his orders were to detain the squadron, and he desired, if possible, to execute his orders without bloodshed. But the Spanish ships were equal in number to the British, and carried heavier guns. To an overwhelming force the Spaniards might have struck without resistance, but pride forbade yielding to what was really an inferior force.

A fight, short, fierce, and bloody, followed: one Spanish frigate blew up, the other three were captured, with treasure amounting to £1,000,000 sterling. This incident brought matters betwixt the two countries to a crisis, and on December 12 Spain formally declared war, and undertook to furnish not less than twenty-five ships of the line and eleven frigates for operations against England.

This put under the hand of Napoleon a sea-force of not less than seventy ships of the line. He was able to weave into his combinations new squadrons and harbours, "and he framed," says Mahan, "upon lines equal both in boldness and scope to those of the Marengo and Austerlitz campaigns, the immense strategy which resulted in Trafalgar." But a strategy which ended in such an anti-climax must have been met by one still more daring, or have been wrecked by a valour and strength against which mere "strategy," no matter how adroit and spacious, was vain.

The Rochefort and Toulon squadrons, under the new scheme, were to break out independently, join

hands in the West Indies, and return, thrusting aside the British squadron off Ferrol. The triple fleet was then to anchor in Rochefort afresh, a force too strong to be blockaded, and wait Napoleon's further combinations. Villeneuve slipped out of Toulon, but after three days' rough handling in the great seas, and by the angry gales, of the Gulf of Lyons, he crept back again to Toulon, with three ships of the line crippled and an 84-gun ship left dismasted at Ajaccio. The Rochefort squadron got clear off, and vanished to the south-west, energetically pursued by Cochrane with six ships of the line. But its success was its ruin. No sister squadron joined it; almost every port was sealed against its return; it was, in fact, turned into a cluster of homeless sea-vagrants!

On the morning of April 4, 1805, a frigate with every inch of canvas spread was sighted from Nelson's flagship off Majorca. The many-coloured flags at her masthead spelt out the tidings that the French were out! On the night of March 29, Villeneuve's fleet, as silently as a procession of ghosts—seventeen great ships, eleven of them sail of the line—had come out of Toulon. The quick-eyed British frigates on guard sighted them through the gloom, and hung on their flanks till the morning, to ascertain their course. The gale hardened, and Villeneuve at last shook off his pursuers and vanished over the horizon on a south-west course, and the news only reached Nelson, as we have seen, on the

morning of April 4. Nelson had to solve a problem which might well baffle the quickest and coolest judgment. Was Villeneuve aiming at Egypt, or would he run through the Straits and strike at the Channel, or at the West Indies?

As a matter of fact, Villeneuve was carrying out Napoleon's latest and most daring strategy. Gantheaume was to break out of Brest at the same moment that Villeneuve left Toulon; both fleets were to meet at Martinique, and return, a great armada, to France, an armada growing ever vaster as it gathered into its battle-line the strength of every French port it passed. It would appear off Boulogne the mightiest fleet that ever flew the flag of France. Then, as Napoleon explained long afterwards at St. Helena, "I should have hastened over my flotilla with 200,000 men, landed at Chatham, reached London in four days, plundered the Bank and proclaimed a Republic." "What resistance," he asked, "could an undisciplined army make against mine in a country like England?" The British Cabinet more than half believed all this might happen. Waggons were actually provided to carry off the treasure from the Bank of England, and barges to convey the military stores from Woolwich to Birmingham. Consols sank to 57.

But one-half of Napoleon's plan broke down at the outset. The watch kept by Cornwallis over Brest was too close and stern to be evaded.

Villeneuve, with happier fortune, had not only escaped, but had tricked Nelson. He changed his course, passed through the Straits of Gibraltar, chased Sir John Orde from before Cadiz, and disappeared. Orde, a feeble commander, neither kept touch with Villeneuve nor sent news to Nelson, who was cruising anxiously betwixt Sicily and Sardinia, watching the horizon for the French topsails. Nelson would go neither east nor west till he knew the French objective. "I shall neither go to the east of Sicily," he wrote, "nor to the west of Sardinia, till I know something positive."

At last he decided that the French had run for the Straits, and, in the teeth of a furious westerly gale, he fought his way to Gibraltar, and there got his first definite information. The French had actually passed the Straits! He guessed their objective would be the West Indies. A rich and easy booty awaited them there, and a stroke might be delivered which would commercially half ruin Great Britain. Nelson was aflame with eagerness to pursue, but had to convoy a fleet of transports with 5000 men to the Mediterranean. On May 12, however, he plunged over the horizon in that fierce and memorable pursuit of Villeneuve which stretched through nearly three months, and covered over 7000 miles of sea space.

To discover even a fleet as great as that of Villeneuve in the lonely wastes of the Atlantic was

a business which might well task Nelson's seamanship. He had to go at the pace of his slowest ship—the *Superb*, a vessel with magnificent fighting qualities, but with the sailing capacity of a washing-tub. How Nelson fretted, how his look-outs searched the horizon, may be imagined. The rate of sailing, measured by modern tests, was curiously slow, the daily run sometimes sinking to ninety miles; and Nelson's journal reflects vividly the impatience of his keen and ardent spirit. Napoleon believed that Villeneuve had completely out-manœuvred Nelson. "These boasted English," he wrote, "who claim to know everything, know nothing of it." "Start, start at once," he wrote to Gantheaume at Brest; "in your hands are the destinies of the world!"

But Nelson was the one incalculable disturbing force in Napoleon's plans. Villeneuve anchored at his destination, Martinique, on May 13. His instructions were to wait, in instant readiness to set sail, for the coming of the Brest fleet, and meanwhile, to do as much mischief to the British possessions as possible. But the Brest fleet made no appearance. Sickness broke out in the crowded French and Spanish ships. In less than three weeks 3000 men died; and on June 4 Villeneuve, who feared the appearance of Nelson on one horizon more than he hoped for the approach of Gantheaume on the other, stood out northward from Martinique. On that very day Nelson anchored at Barbadoes! At

that moment the narrowest stretch of sea space parted the two fleets! But a bit of false intelligence at this juncture misled Nelson. General Brereton, in command at St. Lucia, sent word that Villeneuve had sailed to attack Trinidad, and Nelson steered south-east from the Barbadoes instead of north-west. "But for General Brereton's d——d information," he wrote afterwards, "Nelson would have been, living or dead, the greatest man in his profession England ever saw. Now, alas! I am nothing." "If either General Brereton would not have wrote," he adds, "or his look-out man had been blind, nothing would have prevented my fighting him (Villeneuve) on June 6."

Nelson's moods, it is to be noted, are always vehement; but it is true that, if that bit of false news had not sent him a hundred miles out of his course, Trafalgar might have been fought off Martinique instead of three months later, and off the Spanish coast.

Villeneuve meanwhile doubled back in a wide curve towards Europe, and Nelson's swift imagination realised all the mischief which would follow if the French fleet reached the narrow seas. Adding the Ferrol and Rochefort squadrons to his own, Villeneuve might appear off Brest with forty ships of the line, and enter the Channel with sixty ships under his flag! The fastest brig in the British fleet, the *Curieux*, was accordingly despatched to carry the news to England, while Nelson himself pressed

eagerly on in the track of Villeneuve. Napoleon had reckoned that Nelson would be puzzled by Villeneuve's disappearance, and, being puzzled, would hesitate. "He [Nelson] could not be sure that Jamaica was not threatened. During the time he is wasting there in getting provisions and waiting for news, the great blow will be struck." But Nelson's insight was both swifter and surer than Napoleon imagined, and the *Curieux*, outrunning the French fleet, reached England on July 8.

Barham, the First Lord, was old; he had gone to bed, and his servants would not disturb him. So the great news did not reach him until the early morning. Here again Napoleon had reckoned on a certain interval of puzzled delay on the part of the British Admiralty. "The English Admiralty," he wrote, "could not decide the movements of its squadrons in twenty-four hours." But Napoleon underrated his opponents. Barham, as a matter of fact, devised the counterstroke that shattered Napoleon's plans in less than as many minutes! He dictated orders detaching ten ships from the Channel fleet, with five from the squadron before Rochefort, to lie exactly in Villeneuve's track west of Finisterre, and by that move the despised seaman defeated the great soldier. Barham's sole blunder was in putting in command of that all-important squadron a chief—Sir Robert Calder—who lacked the faculty for playing a great part on a great occasion.

On July 19 Nelson dropped anchor in Gibraltar. His great chase of the French fleet in a sense had failed. Thrice he had been within striking distance of his enemy, but the chances of the trackless, wind-blown sea are endless, and Nelson's outlooks had caught no glimpse of Villeneuve's far-straggling fleet. Calder, however, who could make so little use of a great opportunity, had it thrust upon him when he had been only three days cruising on the spot assigned to him.

On the morning of June 22 a thick fog lay heavy on the sea-coast off Ferrol, and two great fleets, all unknowing, were drifting towards each other in the haze. One was Villeneuve's long-hunted fleet of twenty ships of the line, in three divisions, groping its way to Ferrol. The other was the British fleet, under Calder, of fifteen ships of the line, planted, by Barham's shrewdness, in that exact spot, to intercept the French. Just before noon the haze lifted like a curtain, the fleets found themselves in each other's presence, and agitated and many-coloured signals broke out simultaneously from the French and English flagships. Calder, as a matter of fact, was disconcerted by the numbers of the enemy. He counted twenty line-of-battle ships where he had expected only seventeen. Nelson, with fifteen ships of the line, would have closed in battle on twenty French ships with entire cheerfulness, counting the odds generous; but Calder had no

gleam of Nelson's haughty courage or power of initiative. He was brave, but with the bravery of an anxious man who more than half expects disaster. If Nelson's flag had been flying that morning from the mast of the *Prince of Wales*, instead of Calder's, the victory of Trafalgar would have been ante-dated by a good many weeks.

The two fleets approached each other coyly. Calder at 3.20 made the signal to "engage the enemy," and a few minutes afterwards recalled the order. The fog drifted afresh across the field of operation, and about 5.20 P.M. the hostile lines clashed against each other, rather by accident than by design. A confused and indecisive action followed, a contest rather of individual ships than of fleets. By half-past nine the firing had ceased and two Spanish ships had struck. On the 23rd the fleets were about seventeen miles apart, visible to each other only at intervals through the fog. Villeneuve manœuvred as if to renew the engagement, and Calder gathered his ships into close order for battle. But neither commander was eager to fight, and on the 25th the fleets lost sight of each other. Villeneuve bore up for Vigo; Calder convoyed his two prizes northwards.

Calder's "victory" was resented in England as a failure, and that admiral had to clear himself by the disquieting process of a court-martial. If a French fleet of fifteen ships had fought an English fleet of

twenty ships, and captured two, France would have gone wild with exultation over the triumph. As a matter of fact, when the tonnage, the weight of fire, and the crews of the two fleets are analysed, Villeneuve was at least one third stronger than Calder. But Great Britain had taught her admirals to do great things, and resented anything less than great results from them.

On the 29th Calder resumed the blockade of Ferrol, but a south-west gale blew him off the port at the exact moment when Villeneuve reached it. Napoleon, suspecting Villeneuve's over-eagerness to run into any port that offered itself, had a message waiting in Ferrol for his admiral, sternly forbidding him to enter there; and Villeneuve obeyed the letter, but violated the spirit, of the Emperor's order by anchoring, with the squadron drawn from Ferrol, in Vigo Bay. Calder fell back to Cornwallis, on guard at Brest. Nelson, worn-out with his long cruise and in broken health, had already sailed for England in the *Victory*, leaving his ships also under the flag of Cornwallis.

Napoleon's great combination, thus, had practically failed. There were twenty-nine French and Spanish ships of the line in Vigo under Villeneuve, and twenty-one in Brest under Gantheaume; but betwixt them, and guarding the Channel against both, was Cornwallis, with the fleets of Calder and of Nelson added to his own, a fighting force of some

thirty-five ships of the line; inferior in numbers, but superior in fighting efficiency to either of the hostile fleets, or probably to both combined. Villeneuve, it is true, might make a wide sweep round Cornwallis and reach the Channel; and the British admiral could scarcely strike at him without releasing Ganteaume. This, indeed, was what Napoleon ordered in most peremptory accents; "Make us masters of the Straits of Dover, if it be but for six hours," was the burden of all his entreaties and commands. "Appear here," he wrote, "but for twenty-four hours, and you will have fulfilled your mission." "Set out," he cried; "lose not a moment. Bring your united squadrons into the Channel and England is ours."

On August 11 Villeneuve actually put to sea. When the news reached Cornwallis, he despatched eighteen ships of the line, under Calder, to pursue the enemy's fleet. It was an ill-judged move, under a singularly unfit commander. Calder had counted the odds of twenty ships to fifteen too great on July 22; his imagination would certainly have been much more impressed by the odds of twenty-eight to eighteen, had he actually met Villeneuve. The French admiral, however, was even less capable of an audacious stroke than Calder. The fleet of Cornwallis, like the threatening shape of some mighty phantom, barred entrance to the Channel; and on August 16 the French admiral turned the heads

of his ships away from Boulogne towards Cadiz. He reached that port on the 20th.

Collingwood—a sailor of different type to Calder—who kept guard over Cadiz, drew off as the great French fleet, filling the whole western horizon with its forest of masts, came round Cape St. Vincent; but when the straggling procession of ships, little and big, had crept into Cadiz, he coolly resumed his blockade—four ships, that is, solemnly “blockading” nearly forty! The humour of that feat was almost as delicious as its daring.

With the turn of the helm which swung Ville-neuve's ships in the direction of Cadiz instead of Boulogne, Napoleon's great scheme for the invasion of England vanished like a dream. “Napoleon,” says Lanfrey, “watching on the coast of Boulogne, his eyes fixed on the horizon where he expected every moment to see his victorious fleet appear, experienced all the agitations of hope and fear, and endured with a heart full of anger the torment he was least capable of bearing—that of uncertainty.”

And Napoleon had good reason for anxiety. He might have fought England or the Continent separately; but he had committed the great blunder of plunging into a struggle with both at once. In the actual tactics of the battlefield no one practised with subtler art than Napoleon the plan of dividing his enemies, and of crushing them separately and in detail; but in what may be called the higher

strategy of statesmanship, Napoleon completely inverted that process. He united his enemies instead of dividing them. He dissipated his own forces. Thus he kindled war on the Continent at the very moment when he was committed to the great adventure of the invasion of England. The elements of a new and mighty coalition against him amongst the Great Powers were trembling into existence. He exasperated them into activity. He gave the precipitating shock which crystallised them into definite shape. Pitt, in fact, adroitly availing himself of the provocation Napoleon supplied, had already built up a new coalition. The seizure of the Duc d'Enghien on the territory of Baden had deeply offended the Czar, and on April 11 a treaty was signed betwixt Great Britain and Russia. The annexation of Genoa by France drove Austria into the alliance, and Sweden followed.

It may be said, in view of these facts, that the failure of the Boulogne flotilla was the happiest possible circumstance for Napoleon himself. What could have saved his empire if, at the moment he was fighting a desperate battle in front of London, a combined Russian and Austrian army had been marching on Paris? "At the very same time," says Seeley, "when his grand stroke against England was in suspense, Napoleon extended his power so recklessly in Italy, behaved with such insolence to the German Powers, and shocked public feeling by acts

so Jacobinical, that he brought upon himself a new European coalition. It was the great mistake of his life. He was not, in the long run, a match for England and the Continent together; and he made, at starting, the irremediable mistake of not dividing these two enemies. He seems, indeed, to have set out with a monstrous miscalculation, which might have ruined him very speedily, for he had his plans for an invasion of England and a war in Europe at the same time."

The story of Napoleon's wrath when the news reached him that Villeneuve had turned back from the Channel is familiar. "That Villeneuve," he had already written to his Minister of Marine, "is not fit to command a frigate." Daru, who was present when the news of Villeneuve's change of course reached the Emperor, has described Napoleon as striding up and down his cabinet in a paroxysm of anger that almost choked speech. "What a navy!" he gasped. "What an admiral! What sacrifices lost! . . . This Villeneuve! instead of being in the Channel, he has put into Ferrol. I see it clearly; he will be blockaded there!"

But if Napoleon could not strike at the enemy he most hated, he could strike those who were nearer. He always, as he said, "made his plans in two ways." If one course failed, that is, he had an alternative ready. Already there lay in his brain the plan of a great Continental campaign, and with that strange

gift for swift and irrevocable decision which characterised his genius, he instantly dictated the orders which set the French columns moving along a hundred roads, to Austerlitz, to Jena—and, though he knew it not, to the red flames of Moscow and the horrors of the Great Retreat. He would reach London, he hoped, if not by the Straits of Dover, then by Vienna and Berlin! The thousand boats in Boulogne were abandoned and forgotten. They deserve to be remembered now, only as the symbols of a failure.

Villeneuve's great fleet meanwhile lay a useless weapon in Cadiz, until, on October 20, the French admiral led out his long-hunted ships to the flames and thunder of Trafalgar.

CHAPTER XIV

TRAFALGAR : THE TACTICS

NELSON is the dominating figure in this greatest of sea-fights. Trafalgar is far more absolutely shaped and coloured by the personality of Nelson than Marengo is by that of Napoleon, or Waterloo by that of Wellington. No sea-going Desaix, no marine edition of Blücher, emerges in the tumult of Trafalgar to decide its fortunes. The battle was fought and won in the cells of Nelson's brain before it was fought on the tossing floor of the Atlantic. His will and genius are the decisive forces in it. Against the smoky background of that tremendous conflict his figure stands in unfading clearness, somehow effacing all others. It is not in the least knightly or picturesque in outward look. A homely figure, slender, stooping, boyish—boyish still in spite of the scars of so many battles—with the careless hair lying low on his brow; mutilated, semi-blind; clad in threadbare and weather-stained uniform, with four tarnished and lack-lustre stars stitched on the left breast. And yet in the most heroic hour of English history this is the most heroic figure.

Nelson died almost exactly as the battle ended—the last sounds that pierced his dying senses were the tumultuous cheers of his exultant crew. The record in the *Victory's* log has a quaint and unconscious significance: "Partial firing continued until 4.30, when a victory having been reported to the Right Hon. Lord Viscount Nelson, K.B., he died of his wound." It is as though the spirit of the dying sailor lingered with obstinate vitality till victory was certain. Trafalgar, in a word, is but the final syllable of Nelson's biography; and, taken artistically, the tale of Trafalgar can be best told as a chapter of biography rather than of history.

The news that Villeneuve had entered Cadiz was brought to England by Blackwood, and on September 15 Nelson sailed in the *Victory* to assume command of the Mediterranean fleet. The scene of his embarkation is historic. Nelson had, at last, burned his own impress ineffaceably, and as in characters of flame, on the general English imagination. He was the greatest of British sailors, the most complete embodiment of that genius and daring by virtue of which England won, and still keeps, the queenship of the sea. And, somehow, a vague sense that Nelson was sailing to his last sea-fight was abroad. So his embarkation was a farewell. As he walked through the cheering crowd to his boat on the beach at Southsea, men looked on his face as though it already belonged to another world. "Many were in

tears," says Southey, "many knelt down before him and blessed him as he passed." Tears, it may be added, represent for a British crowd a very rare mood.

Nelson himself shared this sense that his life was entering on its last scene. His imagination had flashes of electric brightness, when everything shone sunlike; but these alternated with pulses of darker feeling, in which all stars were quenched! He seemed to know, as he stepped into his boat at Portsmouth, that his flag was flying for the last time from the *Victory's* peak. One of his Nile captains, with a sailor's quaintness, had presented him with a coffin made from the mast of the great French flagship destroyed in that fight; and before he sailed Nelson directed the coffin to be prepared. It would be wanted on his return. His last words to his sister as he stepped into the boat were, "Oh, Katie, that gipsy!" A gipsy in the West Indies, many years before, had foretold that he would rise to the head of his profession by the time he was forty years old. To the inquiry, "What then?" the woman answered, "I can tell you no more. The book is elosed." Nelson won the battle of the Nile just before he was forty; and he scarcely doubted that for him "the book" was now about to be closed.

Yet the approach of battle always acted as a tonic on Nelson. It thrilled his nature with an exhilaration compounded of many elements: the challenge of duty; the sense of the offer by fate of a sublime

opportunity, of the approach of a scene on which generations yet unborn would gaze with wonder. And all this seemed to quicken every faculty in Nelson, giving a new vision to his eye, a keener energy to his brain, a radiance to his very face. The certainty of victory overmastered the sense of inevitable and swift-coming death. "Depend upon it, Blackwood," he said, "I shall yet give Mr. Villeneuve a drubbing;" and with characteristic eagerness he set sail for Cadiz.

On the 25th the *Victory* was off Lisbon, and Nelson sent forward instructions saying he would join the fleet off Cadiz out of sight of land, that no hint of his arrival might reach the French and discourage them from attempting to break out. At nightfall on September 28, the *Victory* sighted Collingwood's heavy line-of-battle ships, twenty-three in number, cruising twenty miles westward of Cadiz, a detachment of six ships keeping guard immediately outside the harbour. The next day—Nelson's birthday—the captains of the various ships boarded the *Victory* and presented themselves to their newly-arrived admiral, and the scene was memorable. Collingwood was a plain, slow-minded, though gallant sailor, with a strain of homely simplicity running through him. He was, indeed, curiously like Marryat's "Peter Simple" grown old and commanding a fleet. Nothing in Marryat is more amusing than Collingwood's own account of

how he began sea-life. He was found by the first lieutenant of his ship sitting beside a gun crying at his separation from home; and, with Peter Simple-like ingenuity, he tried to propitiate that disgusted officer by offering him a large piece of plum-cake which his mother had given him. Collingwood—slow, methodical, uninspiring, a terrible fighter, but as prosaic as any Jack in the fore-castle—quite failed to touch the imagination of his fleet. But Nelson's arrival was like the thrill of an electric shock. He had the art of kindling men.

The captains who crowded the low state-cabin of the *Victory* to welcome Nelson were themselves a remarkable group. The knights of King Arthur's table, the classic heroes who contended on the windy plains of Troy, were not more familiar with battle than they were. The sound of their names, indeed, is like a passage from the "Iliad." Hardy—who was to kiss the dying Nelson—and Freemantle, and Pellew, and Blackwood; Codrington, whose flag afterwards flew at Navarino; Duff, who had seen thirteen battles before he was sixteen years old, and for whom, as for Nelson, Trafalgar was to be the last fight; Hallowell, towering like a marine Goliath above his brother captains, Nelson's comrade in many a wild scene; Louis, who played a great part at the Nile; Rotherham of the *Royal Sovereign*; Moorson of the *Revenge*, and many another.

It would be difficult in all history to match, for

daring and hardihood and capacity for leadership, the men who commanded the British ships at Trafalgar. Yet as they gathered round Nelson in the cabin of the *Victory*, a curious wave of emotion, which all of them felt, but which none of them could explain, swept through them. Sailors are a simple-minded race, in whom the primitive emotions are strong; and in that scene in the *Victory's* cabin unashamed tears ran down more than one grim visage familiar with tempest and battle. There was, somehow, a touch of womanly sweetness in the fire of Nelson's genius which thrilled the hearts of his captains.

Presently, to his kindled and listening captains, Nelson explained his plan of the coming battle. It was simple, but with the simplicity of genius. He was sure that the hostile fleet, when met with, would be in line; the British fleet, on the other hand, would be in three—or, as finally arranged—in two columns; and Nelson proposed to throw his whole strength on the centre and rear of the enemy's fleet, thus leaving the enemy's van to sail off into space. Forty ships—or thirty-three—spread out in one long straggling line easily lent themselves to dislocation. The van would find it hard to succour the rear. Even if the van swung round to join in the fight, Nelson knew it would be with many pangs of hesitation, and with a delay which would be fatal to the ships under attack.

The tactics of the coming fight were explained

with great clearness and detail in a memorandum dated October 9. The British columns were to draw on to Villeneuve's line till they reached a position parallel with it, and with each other. They would then bear up and simultaneously, but at separate points, break through the enemy's line, the lee column piercing it about twelve ships from the rear, the weather column about ten ships from the van. The succeeding British ships in each column would break through in all parts astern of their leaders and engage to leeward. These were, in a word, the tactics of the Nile adapted to a fleet in movement. Nelson's fleet was inferior in numbers to that of Villeneuve — twenty-seven to thirty-three — but by this plan the British would have a superiority in strength at the points of attack.

Nelson's brain could think with crystalline clearness when planning, in advance, the movements of contending fleets; and, as a matter of fact, Trafalgar was packed into the grey matter of his brain long before it took concrete and historical form. Lord Sidmouth records how, on September 10, Nelson spent some hours with him at Richmond Park. He drew with his finger on a little study table the plan of the coming battle. "Rodney," he said, "broke the line at one point; I will break it in two." That little table, on whose polished surface Nelson's left hand drew Trafalgar in prophetic outline, is still preserved. It now carries a brass plate reciting how,

“On the 10th day of September 1805, Vice-Admiral Lord Viscount Nelson described to Lord Sidmouth upon this table the manner in which he intended to engage the combined fleets of France and Spain, which he expected shortly to meet. He stated that he should attack them in two lines, led by himself and Admiral Collingwood; and felt confident that he should capture either their van and centre, or their centre and rear. This he successfully effected on the 21st of October following, in the glorious battle of Trafalgar.”

Nelson stamped his plan in broad outline upon the imagination of his captains. It delighted them by its simplicity and promise of success, and each went back to his ship carrying in his brain a perfect mental picture of his admiral's strategy.

Meanwhile Villeneuve's fleet was being forced out of Cadiz, partly by mere hunger, and partly by the reproaches and orders of Napoleon. The supply of food for a vast fleet in a closely blockaded port naturally grew small, and Napoleon was raining on his unhappy admiral wrathful, and daily repeated, orders to fight. He was to save the imperial fleet the shame of being blockaded by an inferior force. Napoleon provided for the alternative of his admiral's cowardice making him disobedient. In the event of his “excessive pusillanimity” keeping him still inactive in Cadiz, Admiral Rosilly was to replace him, and Villeneuve was to return and give an account of

his conduct at Paris to the Emperor himself. His Majesty, Villeneuve's orders ran, "counts the loss of his vessels for nothing if he loses them with honour."

Villeneuve called a council of war; its decision, based on a calculation of chances, was unanimous against sailing out to meet the enemy. Then the Emperor's letter was produced; its express accusations of cowardice stung the gallant men to whom they were read, and it was decided at all risks to sail out and engage the British.

Nelson, on his side, was employing all his art to allure the Franco-Spanish fleet from its shelter. He kept the main body of his fleet cruising out of sight fifty miles to the westward; only a light squadron of frigates was visible from the port. But betwixt the frigates and the British fleet stretched a repeating line of heavier ships; and so, through sixty miles of sea-air, any sign of movement on the part of Villeneuve's fleet was promptly signalled to Nelson. With a westerly wind Nelson could easily run to Cadiz when the French were clear of the port. If an easterly wind blew, Nelson promptly beat up to Cape Spartel, the African outpost of the Straits, so that he was still, with the wind on his quarter, within striking distance of Cadiz.

On October 19 came the long-wished-for signal: the enemy was putting out to sea! The process was tedious, for Villeneuve's ships were clumsy, his

crews ill-trained, and his captains, familiar with the experience of being blockaded, had more than half-forgotten their seamanship. By nightfall, indeed, only twelve ships had laboriously worked themselves clear of the harbour; it took Villeneuve's huge and ill-handled fleet two days to scramble fairly out of Cadiz. It then ran before a south-west wind in five columns—or rather shapeless groups—to reach a position where it could make a clear run for the Straits. Nelson instantly bore up for Cape Spartel. He still mistrusted the coyness of Villeneuve, and would not show a topsail over the horizon till the Franco-Spanish fleet had got so far to sea that it could not reach Cadiz again without a fight. Blackwood, with his frigates, hung to windward of the Frenchmen, keeping vigilant watch over them. "Watch all points, and all winds and weathers," Nelson had written to Blackwood, "for I depend upon you." He was to fire guns every three minutes by the watch during the daytime, and send up rockets at short intervals through the night. And thus, with alternate pulses of sound and flame—far-heard and far-seen—he signalled every movement to Nelson, sixty miles distant.

Blackwood, the most gallant of sailors, did his perilous business splendidly. The weather was thick with haze, but Blackwood clung so near to the enemy's ships that their great hulls and towering piles of grey canvas were always visible through

the murky air. Night fell. Far to the east stretched a faint and scattered line of lights; it was Nelson's fleet, but so far off as to be invisible to the French. But on the other horizon, Blackwood, from the quarter-deck of the *Euryalus*, could see the thirty-three stern-lights of the enemy, flaming like so many beacons. Blackwood, covering every light on board his own ship, ran daringly down within gunshot of the great, dimly-seen hull which he guessed to be Villeneuve's flagship. As the night wore on towards dawn, the memorable dawn of October 21, Blackwood wrote in his journal, intended only for his wife's eye, "I expect before this hour to-morrow to carry Villeneuve on board the *Victory* in my barge, which I have just painted nicely for him!" A British sailor with his enemy under his lee is apt to be even unreasonably sanguine!

The morning of the 21st broke soft and fair. It was Sunday, and a sort of Sabbatic peace seemed to lie on the sea and fill the air. The faintest of winds blew. The misty sea, at long intervals, rose in a gentle swell and rolled towards the Straits. The two great fleets were at last in sight of each other, about thirteen miles apart. To the east, showing black against the glistening dawn, loomed Cape Trafalgar. At twenty minutes to seven the signal to "prepare for action" was flying from the *Victory's* peak.

Nelson had twenty-seven line-of-battle ships under

his flag. He had previously detached six ships of the line, under Admiral Louis, to Gibraltar to water. Louis was loath to go, lest he might miss the approaching fight. "Don't mind, Louis," said Nelson; "they won't come out yet." But Villeneuve had come out, and Louis had not returned. Nelson, too, had weakened his fleet by a characteristic act of generosity. Calder was recalled to London to undergo a court-martial for his conduct in the fight on July 22, and Nelson had allowed him to sail in his flag-ship, the *Prince of Wales*, perhaps the finest single ship in the fleet. Between October 9 and 13, however, four line-of-battle ships had joined company; but in this way Nelson, on the morning of Trafalgar, had only twenty-seven ships under his flag instead of thirty.

Villeneuve's fleet consisted of thirty-three ships of the line, eighteen French and fifteen Spanish, and, as it lay stretched out along five miles of the horizon, fretting the sky with its tall masts and swelling canvas, it formed a strangely picturesque spectacle. The British ships were painted black, with yellow bands along their sides. They were compact, sober, workman-like, stripped like gladiators for the arena. The Franco-Spanish ships, on the other hand, were bizarre and many-coloured. Some were black, with bands of bloodlike red. The *Santissima Trinidad*, the hugest warship then afloat, was a gleaming mass of red and white, with menacing white figure-head

rising high in air. The *Santa Anna*, scarcely less gigantic in size than the *Santissima Trinidad*, was painted a funereal and unrelieved black.

The irregular order of Villeneuve's great fleet added, perhaps, to its artistic effect, but was an expressive sign of its want of discipline and seamanship. It certainly was not, like Nelson's fleet, a compact and terrible weapon, pliant to every impulse of a great captain's will. Villeneuve was personally a brave man, but his courage was of the passive order, and he lacked the indefinable power that makes a true leader of men. Yet the order he addressed to his fleet before leaving Cadiz was not unworthy of an admiral about to meet the greatest seaman the world has known, in the greatest sea-fight of all history. "There is nothing," he wrote, "to alarm us in the sight of an English fleet. Their sixty-four-gun ships have not 500 men on board; they are not more brave than we are; they are harassed by a two years' cruise; they have fewer motives to fight well." Then, with a touch of sternness, he added that any captain whose ship was not under fire would be counted a defaulter.

It is still keenly debated whether Nelson did not, at the last moment, and just when the two fleets were closing on each other, alter his plan of battle. It would seem as if, kindling with the actual sight of his enemy, he suddenly varied at least one detail in the battle-plan. Instead of gaining a position to

windward of the enemy's line and parallel with it, and then flinging his weather line on the enemy's centre and his lee line on its rear, he attacked boldly in two columns; bearing down, that is, at right angles to the enemy's line.

But the plan formed in advance on October 9, was, in its essence, that on which the great fight was waged on October 21. Nelson flung the whole of his fleet on two-thirds of his enemy's line. He smote that line with the heads of his columns at two separate points simultaneously, and broke it asunder as with the thrust of parallel darting spear-points. Collingwood, leading the lee column, pierced Villeneuve's line twelve ships from the rear, and Nelson with the weather column broke through about ten ships from the van, while the British ships in each column broke through astern of their leaders. Each amputated section of Villeneuve's line was thus crushed by a superior force, while his van was—for two decisive and fatal hours, at least—thrown out of action. But Nelson did vary one detail of his proposed tactics. He abandoned the position of his columns parallel to Villeneuve's line earlier than was originally intended, and led straight down on the enemy's front. It is probable that his ardour for battle, set on flame by the actual sight of the hostile line, overbore, in that one detail, his cooler judgment. He took the swifter and more daring plan of attack, the one which promised, perhaps, a swifter



Walker & Boutall sc.

victory, but which was also attended with greater risks; for the leading British ships sailing down on so wide a front of fire might be destroyed before the French line was pierced, or their own supports come up. But Nelson saw before him Villeneuve's straggling and far-stretched line. He felt his mastery over it. His courage kindled to a higher temperature as battle drew near; and, with a sort of haughty daring, he led straight down upon it.

The late Admiral Colomb, in the *United Service Magazine*, gave a series of sketches, deduced from Nelson's memorandum of October 9, showing what a spectator, who had been able to look down on Trafalgar about 2 o'clock on October 21, would probably have seen. One plan shows the two British columns bearing down on Villeneuve's line: the other shows the effects which must have followed when Collingwood and Nelson pierced it. The *Royal Sovereign*, thrust across the moving Franco-Spanish line, would block the section cut off, while the ships ahead would drift on, making a steadily widening gap in Villeneuve's order; and exactly the same results must have followed when the *Victory* in smoke and thunder broke in betwixt the enemy's van and centre. The van would be out of the fight, and could only reach it by a long and tedious manœuvre. The centre and rear would be resolved into two confused clusters of ships, with all order lost, and each attacked by a superior British force. The two

plans are reproduced here ; and they represent, with sufficient accuracy, what actually occurred.

By seven o'clock, as we have seen, the British fleet in two columns, a mile apart, was bearing down on the enemy's line. Villeneuve at this moment was steering eastward—from Cadiz, that is. The wind was so faint that any quickness of manœuvring was impossible, and, as a matter of fact, the British columns were by this time not stately and ordered lines, but irregular clusters of ships, the position occupied by each ship being determined by its speed or want of speed. "We all scrambled into battle," says Codrington, "as soon as we could." The leading ship in each column, however, was well ahead, the *Victory* being almost the quickest ship in the British fleet, whilst the *Royal Sovereign*, newly coppered, easily led ahead of its own column.

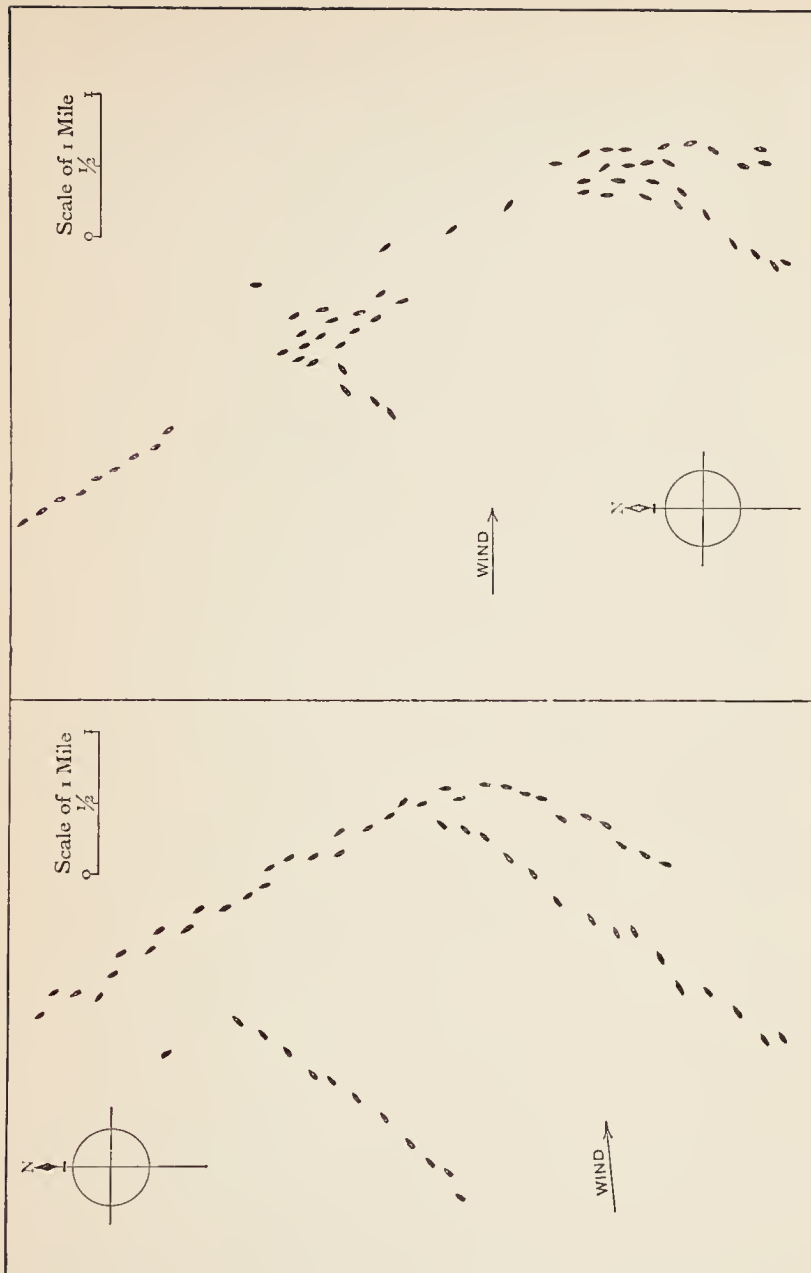
In every ship, it may be added, all the arts known to sailors for adding to the speed of a vessel were eagerly employed. From the captain to the youngest powder-monkey there was a sort of life-and-death competition to creep before some rival ship, and get first into the fray.

At this moment Villeneuve signalled to his entire fleet to wear from rear to van. He was drifting too far from Cadiz, and he wished to have that port under his lee. The manœuvre was clumsily performed—it was not completed, indeed, until nearly noon. The change altered the course, but not

the position, of the fleet. What had been the rear became now the van, and the far-stretching line began to slowly creep on a course a little west of north.

Nelson watched the manœuvre grimly. He read Villeneuve's purpose, but he knew that the Frenchman could not evade his stroke. He slightly shifted the helm of the *Victory*, so as to still reach the point at which he was aiming, but kept steadfastly on his course. He had called Blackwood by signal on board the *Victory*, and Blackwood hoped it was to give him command of one of the two line-of-battle ships whose captains had gone home with Calder to take part in that admiral's court-martial. Nelson, however, refused to do this. These ships were in command of their respective first lieutenants, who were entitled to the chance of promotion the battle gave them. The captains of the other frigates came on board, too; they were, in a sense, Nelson's aides-de-camp, and Nelson wished to give them exact instructions. Blackwood was his close and personal friend, and Nelson called him into his cabin to witness the famous codicil to his will in which he commended Lady Hamilton to the generosity of the British Government.

With Blackwood Nelson discussed eagerly the interesting question of how many prizes they might be expected to capture! Blackwood modestly reckoned fourteen would be a sufficient "bag." Nelson



THE BATTLE OF TRAFALGAR.

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declared with emphasis that he would count any number less than twenty an incomplete victory. "We must annihilate the enemy," he said again and again with characteristic fire. Blackwood urged Nelson to shift his flag to the *Euryalus*, and thus, holding aloof from the actual tumult of the fight, he would be able to more effectively control the movements of the fleet. This was practically inviting Nelson to become a mere remote spectator of Trafalgar, and the suggestion met with the scorn which may be imagined. Nelson, however, entrusted Blackwood with a discretionary power to give instructions, in his name, to any of the ships coming later into the fight.

Nelson then made a personal inspection of the *Victory*, deck by deck, the captains of the frigates accompanying him. The imagination lingers over that incident; the low half-lit decks of the great ship; the long curving lines of guns, with their waiting crews, most of them stripped to the waist; the officers standing with drawn swords; the silence, the order, the scarcely breathing expectation. The *Victory*, tried by modern standards, was a comparatively small vessel of a little over 2000 tons burden. The space between each of her decks was just six feet; she carried 100 guns, and a crew of a little over 1000 men. Nelson walked quickly along the crowded but silent batteries, stopping here and there to notice a detail, or to say a few words to the sea-dogs stand-

ing at the breeches of their guns. They must not fire, he warned them, till they saw the enemy's ports. A deathlike silence lay on all the crowded decks till Nelson, on his return, came to the quarter-deck ladder that led to the poop. Then a shout suddenly broke out. It ran, a wave of many-voiced vibrating sound, from deck to deck. It was the sudden cheer of a thousand seamen, a greeting to the great seaman who was leading them into battle.

At ten o'clock, Blackwood made another well-meant attempt to lessen the risk of injury to his admiral. He urged that the *Temeraire* should be allowed to go ahead of the *Victory*. Nelson, with a queer smile, assented, and that ship was hailed, and ordered to lead ahead. But every inch of canvas possible to that ship was already spread, and Nelson watched sharply to see that not a sheet was let fly, nor a sail shortened on board the *Victory* which would reduce its speed. An officer, indeed, who took in an ill-set lower studding-sail for the purpose of re-setting it more effectively, was vehemently rebuked by Nelson as being guilty of a dark design against the *Victory's* speed! As the *Temeraire* showed some slight signs of creeping up past the *Victory's* stern, Nelson, as James records, hailed her, and, with his slightly nasal intonation, said, "I'll thank you, Captain Harvey, to keep in your proper station, which is astern of the *Victory*." Nelson, in brief, meant to surrender the

proud and perilous lead of the *Victory* to no other ship in the fleet.

At eleven o'clock Nelson went below to his cabin, or rather—since the bulkheads which formed his cabin had been removed—to the hanging screens which temporarily formed a cabin for him. His signal-lieutenant followed him with some message, and lifted the screen. Nelson was on his knees. He was writing that memorable prayer, the last lines he ever penned. "May the great God whom I worship grant to my country, and for the benefit of Europe in general, a great and glorious victory; and may no misconduct in any one tarnish it; and may humanity after victory be the predominant feature in the British fleet. For myself individually, I commit my life to Him that made me, and may His blessing alight on my endeavours for serving my country faithfully. To Him I resign myself, and the just cause which is entrusted to me to defend. Amen, Amen, Amen."

Returning to the deck, Nelson said to Blackwood he would "amuse the fleet with a signal;" and after reflecting a moment said, "Suppose we signal, 'Nelson confides that every man will do his duty?'" Some one suggested "England" instead of "Nelson," and Nelson at once caught at the improvement. The signal-officer explained that the word "confide" would have to be spelt, and suggested instead the word "expects," as that was in the vocabulary. So

the more peremptory and resonant word crept into the sentence.

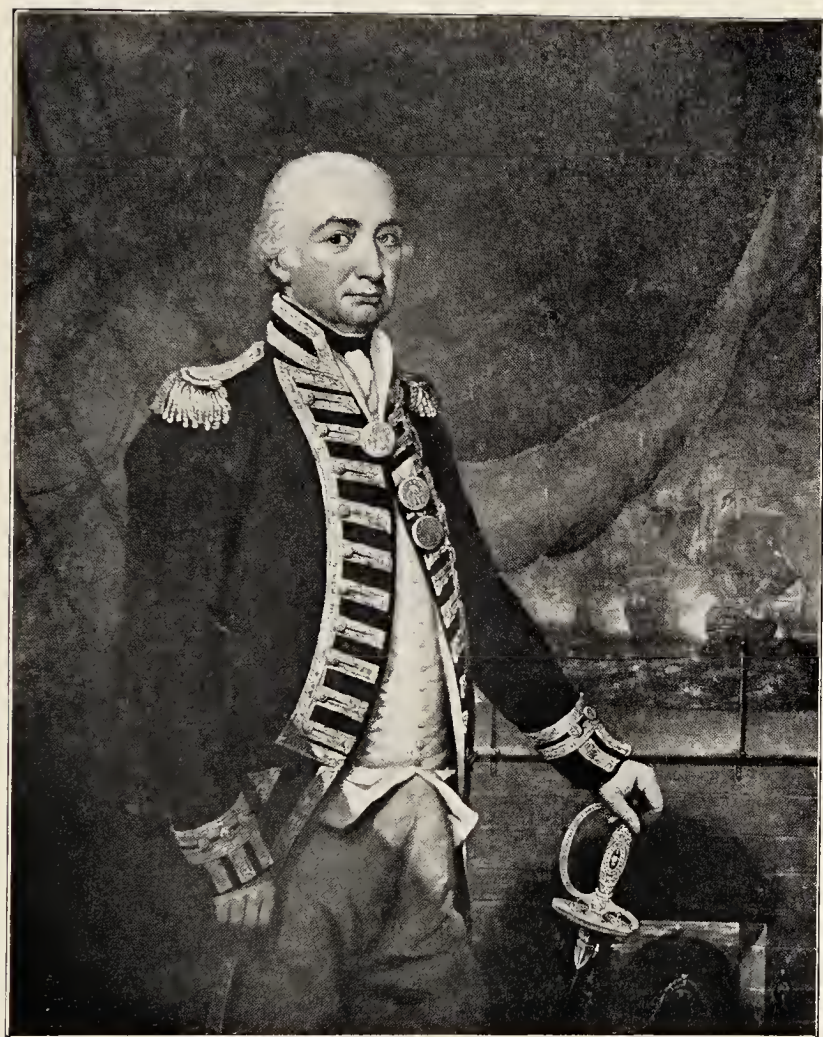
Then the flags on the masthead of the *Victory* syllabled the historic sentence to the slowly moving fleet. That the signal was "received with cheers" is scarcely accurate. "We certainly never heard one word about it in our ship," says Admiral Robinson, "till we heard of our transports on our return to England." But perhaps no other sentence of human speech has awakened such enduring and far-reaching echoes as the syllables spelt out by the gleaming flags at the *Victory's* peak in that signal. They are still a watchword for the English under all skies.

CHAPTER XV

TRAFALGAR : THE FIGHT

THE fleets were now drawing together. The Franco-Spanish fleet had fallen into the shape of an elongated and far-stretching crescent, some four miles from tip to tip; the curve being so marked that the tips of the crescent were past the beam of the *Royal Sovereign* before that ship had reached the French line. The two British columns, in a word, were sailing into a sort of arc of fire formed by thirty-three great line-of-battle ships—huge floating batteries, armed with more than 3000 guns. The crescent was densest at its centre, and the ships forming it were so irregularly distributed that they lay, in places, two and three deep.

The breeze at this time had fallen still fainter, so that the British columns were drifting, rather than sailing, at a rate not exceeding a mile and a half an hour, into the curve of the enemy's batteries. The two British columns were in close but irregular order. "Our line," says Codrington, who commanded the *Orion*, and was under Collingwood's flag, "pressed so much upon each other as



LORD COLLINGWOOD

From a mezzotint by CHARLES TURNER

to be obliged to go bow and quarter instead of ahead."

But the whole spectacle—the glassy, slowly-swell-ing sea, the loose, straggling, but magnificently picturesque curves of the Franco-Spanish line, with its swaying forest of sky-piercing masts, the silent, steadfast, and majestic approach of the British columns—all made up such a sight as the world has rarely witnessed. "I suppose," says Codrington, "no man ever before saw such a sight as I did—or rather as we did; for I called all my lieutenants up to see it." What example of human courage can be imagined more splendid than that offered by the *Victory* and the *Royal Sovereign*, as, clear ahead of their respective columns, they drifted down upon the French line! At this moment Nelson dismissed Blackwood to his frigate. As they clasped hands Blackwood said he hoped to return and find his admiral the master of twenty prizes. "God bless you, Blackwood," replied Nelson; "I shall never speak to you again."

Collingwood, who led the lee column, first drifted into the fight. The *Royal Sovereign* was a clear quarter of a mile ahead of its column, and it was plain that ship must sustain the concentrated fire of the French line for at least twenty minutes before its supports came up. Collingwood, for all his defect of imagination, had a sense of the heroic scale of the great event in which he was taking part. "Now,

gentlemen," he said to his officers, "let us do something to-day which the world may talk of hereafter." But his last order had been given; his mind was at rest. He was waiting for the roar of the guns to begin; and, as he stood at the break of the quarter-deck, he was observed to be calmly munching an apple—a circumstance which illustrates, perhaps, the coolness of his courage, but also shows the prosaic quality of his imagination. Nelson's immortal signal just then fluttered from the *Victory's* peak, and Collingwood's impatient comment was, "I wish Nelson would stop signalling; we know well enough what we have to do."

The *Royal Sovereign* was steering for the *Santa Anna*, a huge, black 112-gun ship; and, almost exactly at noon, the *Fougueux*, the ship astern of the *Santa Anna*, fired the first gun at the slowly approaching British ship. It was the opening note of the stormy orchestra of the guns! With that sound every ship in the two fleets hoisted its colours. A hundred many-coloured flags spread themselves out on the softly blowing breeze; while, in addition, every Spanish ship suspended from the end of its spanker-boom a huge wooden cross.

Slowly and in perfect silence the *Royal Sovereign* drifted on her path. From a dozen great ships a raking fire was poured upon her. Never, perhaps, before in war was a single ship exposed to such an assault. Collingwood told his officers to see that all

the men lay down on the decks and remained quiet ; and while the shot of the enemy crashed on the hull of the *Royal Sovereign*, all its decks offered that spectacle of the men at quarters, but lying down, the officers alone being the standing figures. A single gun was fired from one of the batteries of the *Royal Sovereign*, so as to cover the ship with smoke, and spoil the clearness of their mark for the French ; but otherwise Collingwood made no reply, though the deck of his ship was by this time strewn with killed and wounded, and its sails were rent with shot.

The *Fougueux*, the ship astern of the *Santa Anna*, had now closed up so as to prevent the *Royal Sovereign* breaking through the line, but Collingwood told his captain to steer dead for the *Fougueux*, and carry away her bowsprit. The Frenchman, however, shrank from the shock and backed her maintopsail, so that the great hull of the English ship found room. Collingwood held his fire until the bowsprit of the *Royal Sovereign* glided slowly past the stern of the *Santa Anna*. At that moment he cut his studding-sails loose—time was too precious to be expended in taking them in—and they fell, a cloud of white canvas, into the water. Then the British ship poured its double-shotted broadside, with deadly aim and suddenness, and at less than pistol-shot distance, into the carved and gilded stern of the great Spaniard. That terrific broadside, delivered so

close and coolly, well nigh destroyed the unfortunate *Santa Anna*. It struck down 400 of her crew and disabled fourteen of her guns. At the same moment, with her starboard broadside, the *Royal Sovereign* raked the next ship in the hostile line. Then her helm swung to starboard, she rounded on the *Santa Anna*, and began to rend her hull with swiftly following and furious broadsides.

The captain of the *Santa Anna*, seeing Collingwood's intention to engage to leeward, had double-manned his batteries on that side; and, just as the yards of the *Royal Sovereign* were brushing the Spaniard's yards, the *Santa Anna* delivered a tremendous broadside. Fifty-six guns, across a distance of not ten yards, were fired into the hull of the *Royal Sovereign*, and such was the weight of the stroke, that the impact made the British ship heel two streaks out of the water. No less than five great line-of-battle ships, indeed, from within a distance of 300 yards, were now pouring their fire on the *Royal Sovereign*. For more than fifteen minutes she was the only British ship in close action. That she was not destroyed is simply amazing, and serves to prove how hurried and ineffective was the French fire.

Collingwood, it is to be noted, even in the passion and tumult of such a drama as Trafalgar, was, like John Gilpin's wife, "of a frugal mind." A top-gallant studding-sail was hanging over the gangway ham-

mocks, and Collingwood called to an officer to come and help him take it in, saying "they would want it again some day." And there was the spectacle seen of an admiral and a lieutenant, in the interests of economy, solemnly rolling up an old studding-sail, while five Spanish line-of-battle ships, at little more than musket-shot distance, were pelting them with broadsides!

Then, looming vast and shadowy through the smoke, came on the *Belleisle*. Next came the *Mars*, the *Tonnant*, the *Bellerophon*, the *Orion*, the *Ajax*, a procession of giants moving into the fight. It marks the spirit with which these ships joined in the fray that, as the *Belleisle* drifted past the *Tonnant* on to the enemy's line, the captain of the one ship shouted to the other, "A glorious day for Old England! We shall have one apiece before night." The lee column, in a word, headed by the *Royal Sovereign*, had rent the French line in two, and was busy destroying the ships in its neighbourhood.

Nelson, on his side, was approaching the French line somewhat at an angle. He was eager to grapple with Villeneuve's flagship, but there was no sign by which it might be identified, and every glass on board the *Victory* was employed in trying to discover it. But the great *Santissima Trinidad* was conspicuous enough. Nelson had last seen her in the great fight off Cape St. Vincent, as she came lumbering down before the wind with the

van of Cordova's fleet, in that desperate attempt to join its dissevered rear, an attempt which Nelson met and defeated in the *Captain*. Eight years had passed since then. The *Santissima Trinidad*, in all the glory of new paint, had come out to her latest fight, and being the biggest ship in the enemy's line, the *Victory* naturally steered for her.

At about half-past twelve the great ships upon which the *Victory* was slowly moving began to fire single shots at her, in order to ascertain if she was within range. Seven such shots were fired at intervals of about a minute each, and the seventh tore a rent through the British ship's topsail. Two minutes of awful silence followed. Majestically rising to the ground swell the *Victory* came on. Then the *Bucentaure*, Villeneuve's flagship, and all the battle-ships around her, broke into lines of darting flame and eddying smoke, and poured their concentrated fire on the silent and slowly-approaching *Victory*.

For nearly forty minutes that ship, forging ahead to the mere impetus of the lazy ground swell, endured, as an unreplying target, this terrible fire. While yet 500 yards distant from the *Bucentaure*, the *Victory's* mizzen topmast was shot away. Her sails were torn to rags. Her wheel was smashed. A single double-headed shot killed eight marines drawn up on the poop. Another struck the quarter of the launch lying on the booms, and drove a tempest of

flying splinters between Nelson and Hardy, one fragment tearing the buckle from Hardy's shoe. "They both," says Dr. Beatty, "instantly stopped and surveyed each other with inquiring looks, each supposing the other to be wounded." Another shot killed Scott, Nelson's public secretary, at Hardy's side. "This is too warm work, Hardy, to last long," said Nelson. No less than fifty officers and men were struck down on the *Victory's* deck before she fired a shot.

But nothing arrested the slow, fate-like advance of the English flag-ship. The French line was now but a few yards distant, and the ships forming it lay so close that, if the *Victory* steered past the stern of the *Bucentaure*, by this time recognised as carrying Villeneuve's flag, it was clear she could not round to, so as to engage her broadside to broadside. Nor yet could she pass through the gap without running on board two great ships—the *Redoubtable* and the *Neptune*—dimly seen covering the interval. Hardy pointed this out. "I cannot help it," Nelson replied; "it does not signify which we run on board of. Go on board which you please, and take your choice."

At one o'clock the stem of the *Victory* slowly forged past the stern of the *Bucentaure*. So close were the ships that the *Victory's* mainyard actually scraped the mizzen rigging of the Frenchman. A 68-pound carronade stood on the *Victory's* forecastle. Its crew had affectionately loaded it with a keg filled

with 500 musket-balls, in addition to the ordinary round shot. Half the men at the gun had been struck down during those terrible forty minutes spent in drifting across the zone of fire. But the survivors were avenged when they discharged their gun into the French ship's cabin-windows! Then, as the British ship pushed slowly on, each of the fifty guns which formed her broadside was, in turn, fired into the *Bucentaure's* stern, in one long, angry, and rending broadside, as destructive as that with which the *Royal Sovereign* had wrecked the *Santa Anna*. It struck down nearly 400 men and disabled twenty guns. Villeneuve afterwards told Blackwood that he "never saw anything like the irresistible fire of the British ships. That of the *Victory*," he added, "was what he could not have formed any judgment of." Those who stood on the upper deck of the *Victory*, including Nelson himself, were covered with the dust beaten out of the shattered stern of the *Bucentaure* by the passage through it of that terrible broadside.

The *Victory* then ran aboard the *Redoubtable*. That ship fired one hasty and spluttering broadside, and immediately shut her lower deck ports lest the British sailors should come storming through them. That curious manœuvre, indeed, was practised by no less than five of Villeneuve's ships during the fight, when they found themselves rubbing sides with British ships—an unconscious and almost

ludicrous tribute to the enterprising quality of British sailors! The *Victory*, however, though her lower deck guns were actually grating the sides of the *Redoutable*, kept them in full and quick action, and to prevent a fire breaking out, which might have destroyed both ships, buckets of water were dashed by the British sailors into the rents made by their shot in the sides of the *Redoutable*. The *Victory*, as a matter of fact, was actually hooked to the *Redoutable*, as one of her boom irons had become entangled in the leach of the French ship's foretopsail. The *Neptune*, a fine French 80-gun ship, the *Bucentaure*, the *Redoutable*, and the gigantic *Santissima Trinidad* were all at this moment firing on the *Victory*. But one after another of that ship's supports came up—the *Temeraire*, the English *Neptune*, the *Leviathan*, the *Conqueror*, the *Africa*, the *Britannia*, the *Agamemnon*.

As each British line-of-battle ship came drifting through the smoke of the fight, and ranged alongside some enemy, the tumult of the battle deepened. The tempest of sound and flame was, of course, fiercest round the two points where the *Royal Sovereign* and the *Victory* had broken the French lines. Where the *Victory* lay, indeed, four great ships—the *Temeraire*, the *Redoutable*, the *Indomptable*, and the *Bucentaure*—with the *Victory* herself, were actually grinding their sides together, a sort of fiery vortex or centre to the whole struggle. But

the whole mile of sea-space betwixt Collingwood and Nelson was a mere flaming battle-ridge.

The *Victory* was enduring the fire of several ships, but her immediate antagonist was the *Redoutable*. That ship was only a seventy-four, and her heavy guns were quickly overpowered by the broadsides of the *Victory*. Nothing could surpass, however, the gallantry with which the *Redoutable* was fought. And she had one advantage over her antagonist: her tops were filled with sharpshooters; in two of them she had brass cohorns, firing langridge-shot. With these the upper deck of the *Victory* was swept until scarcely a living figure was left upon it. Nelson would not put musketry into his tops, as he held the danger of setting fire to the ship's sails to be too great. The *Redoutable* was torn almost to pieces with the British fire. One fourth of her guns were disabled, two men out of every three in her crew were struck down. Repeatedly the *Victory* ceased firing, thinking the Frenchman had struck. But still the spluttering and venomous fire from the tops of the *Redoutable* was maintained.

It was to this Nelson owed his death. He was walking to and fro with Hardy on a little clear track of the *Victory's* quarter-deck betwixt the wheel and the hatch-ladder, the sharpshooters in the *Redoutable's* tops being immediately over them. Just as the pair had reached the usual place of

turning, Nelson suddenly swung round and fell on his left side. "They have done for me at last, Hardy," he said, as his captain stooped over him; "my backbone is shot through." A musket-ball from the mizzen-top of the French ship, not fifteen yards distant, had passed through his shoulder and lodged in the spine. It was probably a chance shot, as Hardy, who was a much more imposing figure than Nelson, would first have attracted a marksman's aim. A French marine named Guillemard, whose life has been published under the title of "The Adventures of a French Sergeant," claims to be the man who shot Nelson. As he tells the story:—

"The two decks were covered with dead bodies, which they had not time to throw overboard. I perceived Captain Lucas [his own captain] motionless at his post, and several wounded officers still giving orders. On the poop of the English vessel was an officer covered with orders, and with only one arm. From what I had heard of Nelson, I had no doubt that it was he. He was surrounded by several officers, to whom he seemed to be giving orders. I saw him quite exposed and close to me. I could even have taken aim at the men I saw, but I fired at hazard among the groups I saw of sailors and officers. All at once I saw great confusion on board the *Victory*; the men crowded round the officer whom I had taken for Nelson. He had just fallen, and was taken below, covered with a cloak."

A marine and two sailors carried Nelson down the many ladders to the cockpit, and, with his solitary hand, Nelson himself spread a handkerchief over his face and over the stars of his uniform, that the men at the guns might not recognise the stricken figure being carried past them.

Meanwhile the battle filled sea and sky with its ever-deepening roar. "No captain could do wrong," Nelson had said, "who placed his ship alongside that of an enemy;" and each of the British ships coming up in turn carried out that instruction, naturally choosing the biggest ship within sight to fall upon. Thus the *Belleisle*, following the *Royal Sovereign*, engaged in succession three great ships, giving and receiving enormous damage. The *Mars*, coming next, took off one of the ships—the *Fougueux*—firing on the *Belleisle*, a little past 2 P.M. From 2 to 3 P.M., however, the *Belleisle* was practically fighting three ships at once, and this with her larboard batteries almost disabled by the fall of her own mainmast. The *Mars*, the *Leviathan*, the *Polyphemus*, in turn drifting into the fight, took off an antagonist. Then came the *Swiftsure*, the crews of the two British ships cheering each other frantically. The only flags the wrecked *Belleisle* was able to show were a Union Jack, flourished from a pike, and an ensign lashed to the stump of the mainmast. Yet the shot-wrecked but unconquerable *Belleisle* compelled one of her opponents, an 80-gun ship,

to strike, and took possession of her with her only remaining boat that could float.

The *Mars* fought a battle almost as desperate. Duff, who commanded it, had told his crew that he would lay them close to the enemy, and he kept his word. The *Mars* had a French ship on each side of her, and a Spanish three-decker on her bow. A little later another French ship took up a position aft to rake her, and while Duff was leaning over his own taffrail, watching through the smoke the loom of the great ship coming up astern, its first broadside slew him, a cannon-ball striking him full on the breast.

No ship was brought more coolly into the fight than the *Orion* by Codrington. He forbade his men to fire a shot till he gave the signal. His officers begged him again and again to fire, as they caught a glimpse through the smoke of some enemy's ship close at hand. But the *Orion*, moving tall and stately amidst the tempest of broadsides, preserved the grimmest silence. At last she crept past the stern of a French ship, the *Swiftsure*, and poured on it a single broadside which brought down all three masts and made the Frenchman strike its colours. Codrington then passed on in search of other foes, and engaging *L'Intrepide*, compelled it to strike. The *Tonnant* fought a gallant duel with the *Algeciras*, the Frenchmen actually attempting to board the *Tonnant*. Only one man, however,

succeeded in reaching the English deck, and he was promptly captured and preserved as a sort of curiosity. No less than two ships struck to the *Tonnant*.

The *Bellerophon* lay with the *Monareo* on one bow and the *Aigle* on the other, each equal to the British ship itself in strength, while three other ships were firing on her aft. The British ship was dismasted, and as the sails fell on the deck they caught fire from the flash of the guns. Her captain and her master were killed, and 116 of her crew struck down. She was, in fact, reduced to the condition of an unmanageable hulk, yet she compelled one of her immediate opponents, the *Monareo*, to strike. The *Bellerophon's* second lieutenant with nine men took possession of the *Monareo*, and during the wild weather that followed the battle this handful of men held the great ship, with its hundreds of prisoners, till she sank. Of the *Defiance* the tale is told that, having compelled the *Aigle* to strike, a difficulty was found in taking possession of her, as the *Defiance* had no boat that could float. One of the officers of the *Defiance* leaped overboard, swam to the stern of the *Aigle*, climbed up by her rudder-chains, and was actually fighting on the *Aigle's* quarter-deck when the *Defiance*, slowly forging ahead, was able to throw a party of boarders on that ship and take possession.

Turning again to Nelson's column, the *Temeraire* engaged at once the *Redoutable* and the *Fougueux*, with intervals of conflict with the French *Neptune*.

The *Conqueror* had the honour of compelling the *Bucentaure*, Villeneuve's flagship, to strike, and sent a marine officer with three marines and a couple of sailors to take possession. Villeneuve and his two officers duly offered their swords to the marine, but that officer judged, as a matter of etiquette, his captain should receive them, and having locked the magazine door and left the two Jacks in charge of the Frenchman, he put Villeneuve and his two captains in his little boat, and pushed off in search of his own ship. It was impossible to find it in the smoke, so the marine took his prisoners on board the first English ship on which he stumbled, the *Mars*.

The *Conqueror*, meanwhile, had fallen on the unfortunate *Santissima Trinidad*, which was faring very much like a sperm whale attacked by a convoy of threshers. One British ship after another came up, blasted the monster with a fiery broadside, and then, drifting out of reach, fell upon some other antagonist. Both the *Conqueror* and the *Neptune* were firing into the Spanish four-decker at the moment she struck, her masts first going by the board. "This tremendous fabric," says an account written by an officer on board the *Conqueror*, "gave a deep roll, with a swell to leeward, then back to windward, and on her return every mast went by the board, leaving her an unmanageable hulk on the water. Her immense topsails had every reef out, her royals were sheeted home but lowered, and the falling of

this majestic mass of spars, sails, and rigging plunging into the water at the muzzles of our guns was one of the most magnificent sights I ever beheld."

Directly after this an officer of the *Santissima Trinidad* waved an English union over its lee gangway in token of surrender. The *Conqueror*, on this, scorning to waste time in taking possession of even a four-decker that had no longer any fight in it, pushed off in search of a new foe; while the *Neptune's* crew proceeded to shift the tattered topsails of their ship for new ones, with as much coolness as though in a friendly port!

The *Africa* coming up to the mastless *Santissima*, sent a lieutenant and a boat's crew to take possession. The English officer found on the wrecked and corpse-strewn deck of the great Spaniard a single officer, and demanded of him if the *Santissima Trinidad* had surrendered. But just at that moment a chance of escape for the big ship seemed to offer itself. The van ships of the allied fleet were coming into the fray, and the *Santissima Trinidad* was drifting in their direction. The English officer was accordingly told the ship was still fighting, and as he could not, with six men, carry and hold a four-decker, he pushed off in his boat. It was left to the *Prince*, two hours later, to put a prize crew on board the Spaniard.

Collingwood was accustomed to tell his men that,

if they could fire three well-directed broadsides in five minutes, no vessel could resist them; but they had actually come to perform that feat in three minutes and a half. The *Santa Anna* naturally fared badly in conflict with such a swift-firing crew, and a little after two o'clock it struck. But the *Royal Sovereign* itself was by this time almost disabled. Only her foremast stood, and it was badly wounded. Blackwood, in the *Euryalus*, took her in tow, pulling the huge three-decker into such a position that it could fire on the enemy's ships still within reach.

The most desperate scenes in the great fight, however, took place immediately round the *Victory*. The fire from the tops of the *Redoubtable* practically cleared the upper deck of the English ship. Only the dead and the dying seemed to be left on it. So defenceless did the English flagship seem, that the Frenchman tried—a very vain and desperate effort—to carry her by boarding. But the hull of the unfortunate *Redoubtable* itself was well-nigh destroyed by the terrific fire of the *Victory*. Of its crew of 643 men, no less than 522 were killed or wounded, a ratio of slaughter, perhaps, without parallel in naval warfare.

Meanwhile Nelson lay dying in the cockpit of the *Victory*. "I am mortally wounded," he said as the surgeons came to his side. "You can do nothing for me, Beatty; I have but a short time to live." Beatty

proposed to probe the wound with his finger, and, putting his left arm round Nelson's waist, he passed his right forefinger into the wound. He knew at once that the injury was fatal. The ball had passed through the lung, severing a branch of the pulmonary artery, and had smashed the spine. The bullet carried into Nelson's body a portion of the gold lace and pad of the epaulette, with part of the cloth of the coat.

That immortal scene in the gloomy, ill-lit cockpit of the *Victory*, where Nelson lay dying, with the tumult of the greatest of sea-fights filling sea and sky about him, has written itself with curious vividness on the English memory. Nothing can surpass its pathos. Nelson was parched with thirst, fevered with the pain of his dreadful wound, and an attendant was kept busy moistening his lips with water and drawing up the sheet over his thin limbs and wasted body. "Pray for me, doctor," he said again and again to the chaplain who knelt beside him. All the changing noises of the battle, however, were intelligible to his dying senses. The sound of a tempest of hurrahs swept once and again through the decks of the *Victory*, and Nelson knew that it was the sign that another, and yet another, French flag had fluttered down, and for a moment the dying seaman forgot his pain. He was eager to see Hardy. "Will nobody bring Hardy to me," he asked repeatedly. But Hardy could not, at that moment, quit the deck.

The ships of the French van were now coming into the fight, and the situation was still full of peril.

At last Hardy came, and the two friends clasped hands. "Well, Hardy, how goes the day with us?" was Nelson's first question. Hardy replied that twelve or fourteen of the enemy's ships had struck. "I hope none of our ships have struck, Hardy," said Nelson. "No, my lord, there is no fear of that." "I am a dead man, Hardy," said Nelson; and to the suggestion that there might yet be some hope, he replied, "Oh, no! it is impossible. My back is shot through." Hardy had to return to his duties on deck, and Nelson lay calmly noting his own symptoms as death crept nearer. "All power of feeling and motion below my breast is gone," he said to the doctor, "and you know I am gone." "Unhappily for our country," Beatty replied, "nothing can be done for you." "God be praised," said Nelson, "I have done my duty." At four o'clock Hardy came again to the side of Nelson, and told his dying chief that it was now certain that fourteen or fifteen prizes had been taken. "That is well," answered Nelson, "but I had bargained for twenty."

Then, in his seaman's brain, rose the picture of the sorely-battered British fleet, with its dismasted prizes, on a lee shore, with a rising gale, and he exclaimed, "Anchor, Hardy, anchor!" Hardy hinted that Collingwood would take charge of affairs. "Not while I live, I hope, Hardy," said the dying man,

struggling to rise in his bed. "No, do you anchor, Hardy." "Don't throw me overboard," he said presently; "you know what to do."

Then came that touch of human feeling that since has made many eyes then unborn grow moist with its pathos. "Kiss me, Hardy." Hardy knelt down and kissed his admiral's cheek. "Now I am satisfied," said Nelson; "thank God I have done my duty!" Hardy had risen, and stood struggling to keep back his tears as he looked at Nelson. Then he knelt down again and kissed the dying man's forehead. The swoon of coming death was already creeping through Nelson's brain, but he asked, "Who is that?" "It is Hardy," was the answer. "God bless you, Hardy," was the whispered reply.

At half-past four Nelson died. There is a curious conflict of testimony as to what were his last words. Burke, the *Victory's* purser, and Beatty, say that his last utterance was, "I have done my duty; God be praised." Scott, the chaplain, gives it as "God and my country." But the words, though diverse, really express the same thought. Nelson's dying whisper is but the conception of his last immortal signal translated into speech. He had "done his duty."



SIR THOMAS MASTERMAN HARDY, K.C.B.

From an engraving after the portrait by R. EVANS

CHAPTER XVI

PITT'S DEATH

BY five o'clock the roar of Trafalgar died into silence. Villeneuve's stately fleet had vanished almost like a procession of shadows. Out of the thirty-three ships which sailed under his flag from Cadiz, one had been blown up, fifteen lay mastless and blood-stained prizes, the rest were in flight. Villeneuve himself was a prisoner, his vice-admiral, Gravina, was dying of a mortal wound. Yet of the actual prizes taken at Trafalgar, only four reached Portsmouth. With nightfall a fierce south-east gale came on. The sea rose to a tremendous height; the shoals of Trafalgar were only thirteen miles to leeward. In every direction dismantled ships—great hulks, their masts gone, their sides jagged with shot-holes, their decks full of the wounded and the dying—were rolling in the furious sea. The *Redoutable* sank at the stern of the ship towing her; the *Bucentaure* had to be cut adrift and went to pieces on the shoals.

A shift of wind in the night enabled the sorely-battered ships to claw off the shoals, but morning

dawned on a wild gale and a stormy sea. All through the day the same wild scene was presented, ships driving on shore, others burning, set fire to by their captors to ensure their destruction. "Close to the port of Cadiz," writes Blackwood, "I had to destroy the *Santissima Trinidad*." So vanished that famous leviathan, the most coveted of all the British prizes. The *Santa Anna*, the *Royal Sovereign's* trophy, was also destroyed. "The French commander-in-chief," Blackwood adds, "is at this moment at my elbow;" and with what feelings Villeneuve gazed from the quarter-deck of the *Euryalus* on the melancholy wrecks of his fleet may be guessed.

It is an example of Napoleon's faculty for colossal lying that he compressed Trafalgar into the statement, "The storms occasioned to us the loss of a few ships after a battle imprudently fought." The *Petit Journal*, a semi-official paper, improved even on Napoleon's invention. It published what it described as an extract from Collingwood's despatch, giving a long list of quite imaginary British ships which had been sunk at Trafalgar! The Spanish imagination, too, is capable of much audacity. In the Museum of Arms at Madrid Trafalgar stands solemnly inscribed to-day as a Spanish victory!

Trafalgar, of course, is not to be judged by the mere number of its prizes, or by the fact that it practically blotted Villeneuve's great fleet out of existence. Of the fifteen ships that escaped, four

were met only a fortnight afterwards by four ships under Sir Richard Straehan and captured. The remaining eleven lay inert hulks in Cadiz till France and Spain broke into war with each other, when they became unresisting prizes. The significance of Trafalgar lies in the fact that it destroyed the last reasonable hope of challenging the supremacy of England on the sea, and turned into an idle dream Napoleon's long-cherished plan of invading Great Britain. The news of Trafalgar reached Napoleon the day after the capitulation of Ulm, a dramatic sign that his supremacy on land was met with haughty challenge by the Power supreme on the sea.

Meanwhile in the dust and tumult of the long conflict with France one great and noble figure had fallen. On January 23, 1806, Pitt died. On October 19 Mack surrendered at Ulm with 30,000 troops, and Pitt's third coalition was shaken almost to its fall. The news of the great disaster reached London on Sunday, November 3, in the shape of a Dutch paper, which Pitt, who knew no Dutch, carried to Malmesbury to have translated. From listening to the fateful news, Pitt, to use Lord Rosebery's words, "went away with a look on his face which never again left it." But then came the news of Trafalgar! The British flag was at last supreme on the sea. On December 2, however, Austerlitz was fought—the "battle of the emperors"—and Pitt's

coalition finally crumbled to dust. "Melville and Ulm," says Lord Rosebery, "had borne heavily on Pitt; Austerlitz killed him." "Heavy news," said Pitt, when he had opened the packet which brought the fatal tidings of this overwhelming defeat, and, in spite of his cool, heroic nature, he would have fainted but for some brandy hurriedly given him.

From that hour Pitt was death-stricken. He wore what was afterwards called the "Austerlitz look." He came home to Putney, but it was to die. As he crossed the threshold of his house there hung before him the map of Europe. "Roll up that map," he said; "it will not be wanted these ten years." He was expecting news from Harrowby, whom he had sent as a special agent to the court of Berlin; and even when speech had almost left him, he would whisper some question as to the direction of the wind, that he might calculate when his messenger would arrive. What Macaulay has finely said of the elder Pitt was true of his equally famous son. "He loved England as an Athenian loved the City of the Violet Crown, as a Roman loved the City of the Seven Hills." Yet his dying eyes saw that country overwhelmed with what seemed irretrievable disaster. "Oh, my country! how I leave my country!"—"how I love my country" is another version—and with those pathetic syllables Pitt's noble voice sank into the silence of death.

Nothing is more curious than what may be called

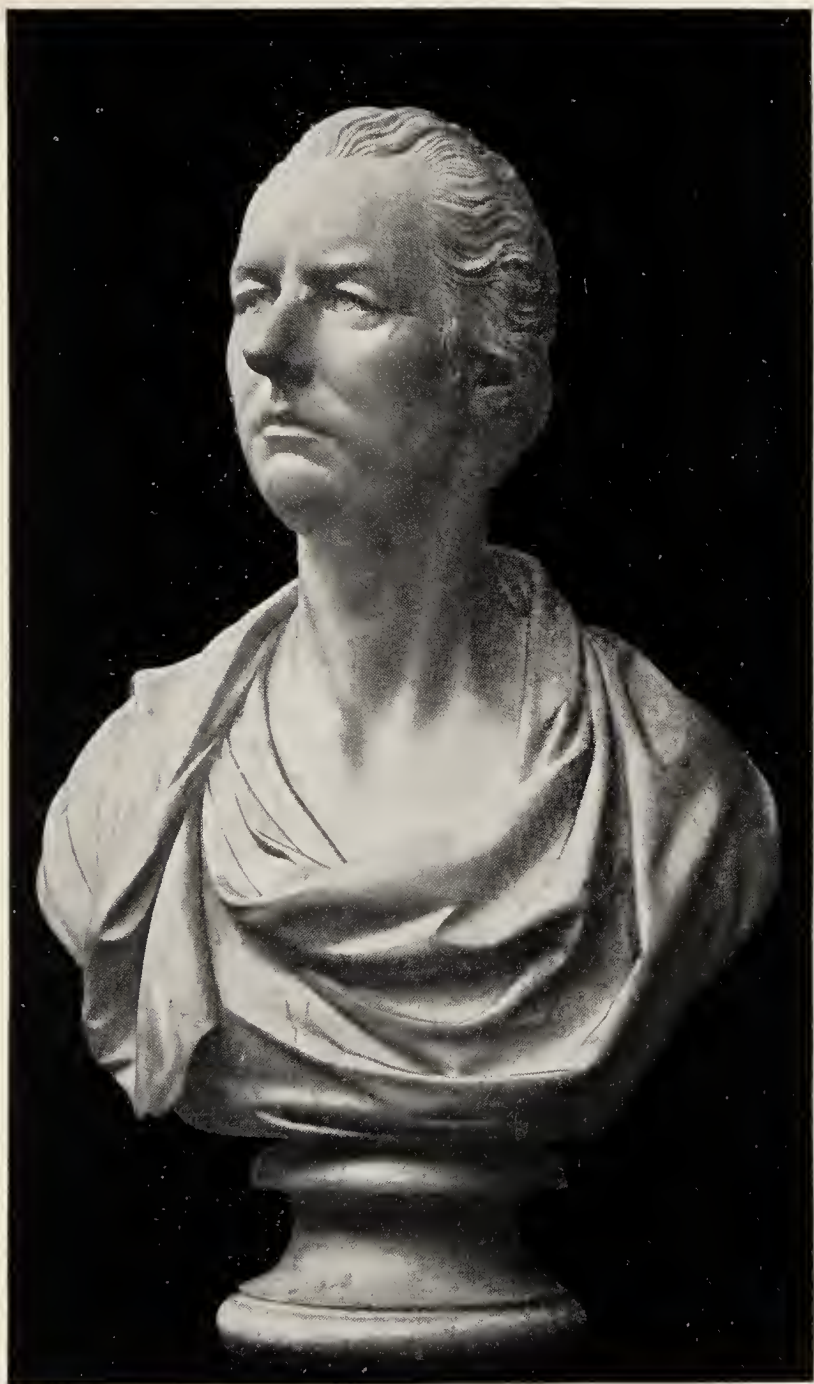
the paradox of Pitt's career. He was, in a sense, the most fortunate, and yet the most ill-fated of men. To no other statesman in British history were such opportunities given, and for none were they more cruelly cancelled as soon as given. The election of 1784 gave him, while not yet twenty-five, supreme political power in Great Britain. No less than 160 supporters of his great rival, Fox—"Fox's Martyrs" they were called by the wits of the day—lost their seats. Pitt had a majority in the House of Commons of two to one. It was said by the wits that the entire Opposition could have been packed into a single hackney coach. "This is a calumny," replied one of them; "we should have filled two." Yet thrice over, in his own special Parliament, in the hour of his greatest triumph, and on questions specially dear to him—on the Westminster scrutiny, on his Bill for Parliamentary reform, and on his proposals for equality of trade between England and Ireland—Pitt suffered hopeless and bitter defeat. His crowded battalions would not follow him!

He was, by bent of genius, a Peace Minister, yet he spent most of his years of office in what to him was the hateful business of war. No other British Minister, perhaps, ever so much hungered for peace, or spent so much money in breaking it. He began his administration with the dream of extinguishing the National Debt, and betwixt 1793 and 1801 he added nearly £300,000,000 to it. He had a wise and

generous zeal for liberal reforms, yet more than half his official life was spent in strangling them. He proposed the abolition of the rotten boroughs fifty years before Lord Grey accomplished it, yet he left the franchise as narrow as he found it. The Habeas Corpus Act was suspended continuously betwixt 1795 and 1801.

The irony of fate pursued Pitt through all his career. By the most eloquent speech of his life he carried a bill against the slave trade; by refusing to interfere with what was supposed to be the "interests" of the newly-captured slave-holding colonies he doubled that evil traffic. Perhaps his greatest legislative feat was the union of England with Ireland. Yet that feat cost him his office, and is held by multitudes to be a blot on his fame. No living Englishman of that generation was less the enemy of France than Pitt, yet none was so much hated by all good Frenchmen. Trafalgar was won while he was still Prime Minister, and that was a victory which might have clothed any Cabinet with glory; but Pitt never realised what Trafalgar meant. He discovered the military genius of Wellington, but did not live to profit by it.

In Pitt's character, and even in his personal appearance, there was the same meeting of curious opposites. He had "hardly the air of a gentleman" is the verdict of one contemporary; he was "the stateliest figure on the public stage of the day" is



WILLIAM PITT

From a marble bust by JOSEPH NOLLEKINS, R.A., in the National Portrait Gallery

the testimony of another; and who does not recall the contrasted figures of Pitt and his greatest rival: Fox rolling into the House, "fat and good-humoured and popular;" Pitt walking swiftly in, spare, dignified, and reserved. Pitt's face is variously described as empty of all gleam of intelligence; his mouth, it was declared, "seemed as if it were only made for eating." Yet both Gainsborough's portraits and Lawrence's fine painting contradict those descriptions. They give us a figure slender and noble, with a face austere yet sweet, and full of a grave strength. He had, said one who knew him well, "the most brilliant eye ever seen in a human face." Pitt, it is said, was haughty and inaccessible. If he had the purity of the icicle, he had also its chilliness. "His nose," Romney complained, "was turned up at all mankind." Yet it is about Pitt that Napier tells the familiar story of how he caught him—the haughty Prime Minister—playing romps under the dining-room table with the young Stanhopes, who were blackening his face with burnt cork! And it is certain that the impeachment and disgrace of Melville did as much to break Pitt's heart and shorten his days as either the capitulation of Ulm or the wreck of Austerlitz. So generously sensitive was he to the obligations of friendship! His personal character was stainless and lofty, yet all his biographers have to vindicate him from obstinate suspicions of intemperance. "While the

Tories," to quote Lord Rosebery, "said he died of a patriot's broken heart, the Whigs averred that he died of port."

Something of the curious irony of Pitt's whole career is found even in the hour and fashion of his death. He saw Trafalgar won, and that great victory must have given a new authority to Pitt's Cabinet. But he heard the tale of Austerlitz, and it killed him! So that over Pitt's dying hour there mingled the glory of the victory which crowned his policy, and the blackness of the great defeat which seemed to wreck it. And Pitt himself, it is to be noted, believed that Austerlitz more than cancelled Trafalgar. Yet, as matter of fact, Austerlitz, when set in the perspective of history, is seen to be a resultless, almost an irrelevant battle. It gave Napoleon a momentary triumph, but it did not finally decide the great strife betwixt him and the Continent. Within four years of Austerlitz Austria was in arms again; within ten years Napoleon himself was a prisoner at St. Helena. But Trafalgar, almost more than Waterloo, was the death-blow to Imperial France. It drove Napoleon to the adoption of that Continental system which destroyed him. Yet Pitt did not realise this. He was an unconscious victor, who died with the anguish of defeat lying heavy on his spirit.

Pitt's character may perhaps be best summed up in the closing words of Lord Rosebery's fine mono-

graph :—"From the dead eighteenth century Pitt's figure still faces us with a majesty of loneliness and courage. There may have been men both abler and greater than he, though it is not easy to cite them ; but in all history there is no more patriotic spirit, none more intrepid, and none more pure."

CHAPTER XVII

THE CONTINENTAL SYSTEM

“The battle between the sea and the land was to be fought out on commerce. England had no army wherewith to meet Napoleon; Napoleon had no navy to cope with that of his enemy. As in the case of an impregnable fortress, the only alternative for either of these contestants was to reduce the other by starvation. On the common frontier, the coast-line, they met in a deadly strife, in which no weapon was drawn. The imperial soldiers were turned into coastguardsmen, to shut out Great Britain from her markets; the British ships became revenue cutters to prohibit the trade of France. The neutral carrier, pocketing his pride, offered his service to either for pay, and the other then regarded him as taking part in hostilities.”—MAHAN.

ACCORDING to Professor Seeley, “the special and peculiar work of Napoleon is the colossal attempt to conquer England by conquering Europe.” It was not merely that the French Emperor would “console himself for not being able to enter London by entering Vienna, Berlin, and Moscow;” the only road by which he could reach London ran through this strange geography.

The explanation of this paradox is found in what is called Napoleon’s Continental system. He could not reach England with the sword. For the island he hated, its girdle of “the inviolate sea” was a magic

armour that could not be pierced. But Napoleon imagined he might "banish" her, as Coriolanus banished the Volscians. He might thrust Great Britain, that is, out of the pale of the civilised world. Or, to vary the figure, he would imprison her within invisible but unpierced walls of isolation, and so leave her to perish. The war ceased to be one of battling armies and contending fleets; it became one of hostile tariffs. It was a swordless war, but it perhaps caused more human misery, and more profoundly affected history, than the sword itself.

✓ This new and strange conflict stretched through seven years. It taxed the endurance of Great Britain to the breaking-point; France itself broke down hopelessly beneath the strain. The suffering caused by the struggle spread over the civilised world. It explains the slaughter of Friedland and Wagram, and the flames of Moscow. It kindled war betwixt America and England; in the long-run it destroyed Napoleon himself. Waterloo and St. Helena are merely the final syllables in the history of Napoleon's Continental system. ✎

The Berlin decree was issued on November 21, 1806, thirteen months after Trafalgar and five weeks after Jena, and it stands in close relation to both those events. Trafalgar proved that France could not contend in arms upon the sea with Great Britain, and Jena showed that Napoleon was absolute master of the Continent. The surrender of Ulm (October 20,

1805), the great defeat of Austerlitz (December 2, 1805), and the Treaty of Presburg (December 26, 1805), had temporarily destroyed Austria. Eylau (February 7, 1807), Friedland (June 14, 1807), and the raft of Tilsit were, later, to make Russia the ally and tool of Napoleon. "I hate the English as much as you do yourself," were almost the first words with which the Czar greeted Napoleon in that famous interview on the raft at Tilsit. "If that is the case," replied Napoleon, "peace is made."

The Peace of Tilsit, in brief, was a conspiracy built on hate to England and intended to overthrow England. And the weapon by which it was to be destroyed was the Continental system. That treaty made it possible for Napoleon to translate his quenchless quarrel with England into the terms of commerce. He was supreme on land. He could close every port of Continental Europe against British trade.

The famous Berlin decree proclaimed the British isles to be in a state of blockade. All intercourse with them was forbidden. No British goods were to be bought or used. All letters addressed in English or to England were to be seized. Every person of British birth on the Continent was declared to be a prisoner and his goods forfeited. No vessel of a friendly Power that had touched at a British port was to be allowed to enter a French harbour. The decree extended to all the States dependent upon France; it was to be thrust by art or force on its

allies. Great Britain, in a word, was to be made the outlaw of the civilised world. With characteristic energy and thoroughness, Napoleon himself, two days after the issue of the decree, wrote to Junot, who was Governor of Paris, enjoining him to take care that the ladies of the court used nothing but Swiss tea and forswore English cottons. "It is a contest of life and death," he wrote, "betwixt France and England;" and every French teapot and sugar-basin and work-basket must be used as weapons in the war!

In a sense the policy of the Berlin decree was not original with Napoleon. He inherited it from the lunatic politics of the Reign of Terror. The Convention and the Directory in turn had tried to enforce it. Wherever the French power ran they decreed that all commerce with England was to be suspended. The possession of British goods was in itself a crime. If a neutral ship in a French port was found guilty of possessing a knife made in the forges of Birmingham, or a cotton handkerchief woven in the looms of Manchester, both ship and goods were confiscated. The taint of British origin made every article that carried it a thing infected. But the spasmodic and swift-changing Governments of the Revolution, that came and went like shadows, were incapable of carrying out a sustained policy, and these violent decrees had, for the most part, been mere rhetorical flourishes.

When Napoleon, however, took up this terrific policy, it was planned on a scale and enforced with an energy which the world had never yet witnessed.

In one sense the Berlin decree was superb in its audacity. At the moment the decree was issued the French flag was a fugitive in all waters. Great Britain was absolute mistress of the sea. But Napoleon would accomplish with a drop of French ink what all the fleets of France had failed to accomplish with their artillery! He would establish a phantom blockade, magical, paralysing, absolute. He would destroy, as with a breath, the whole commerce of England!

But to make this policy effective he must become absolute lord of the Continent. If there was a gap in the zone of hostile sea-shores, the trade of England would leak through it. Hence the Continental system created for Napoleon the necessity of making every Power in Europe, from Russia to Portugal, his slave or his ally. Seeley says of Napoleon's fatal march to Moscow that he "made a dispute about tariffs the ground for the greatest military expedition known to authentic history." But the "dispute about tariffs" was only an attempt to complete the strangling zone of non-intercourse round Great Britain, and to enforce the policy of the Berlin decree on the one Power yet left unsubjugated in Europe.

Great Britain replied on November 11, 1807, by

the famous Orders in Council. Since Napoleon forbade the civilised world to trade with England, England would forbid the civilised world to trade with any Power but herself! She would answer phantom blockade, that is, with phantom blockade. Not merely all French ports, but all ports from which, under French influence, the British flag was excluded were declared to be under strict blockade. Neutrals were allowed to trade betwixt their own ports and the colonies of hostile Powers, and they might also trade with hostile ports closed against British ships, but they must pay a curious price for this privilege. They must first proceed to some British port, unload their cargo, re-ship it, paying certain dues, then sail to the port under blockade. On its home voyage again the unhappy neutral must once more report itself in a British port. The policy of the Berlin decree was thus inverted. The decree enacted no trade with Great Britain; the Orders in Council affirmed no trade with France except through Great Britain. This regulation kept for Great Britain its position as the commercial centre of Europe, and a profitable toll was levied on all goods going into the ports sealed by the Berlin decree.

Napoleon responded by the equally famous Milan decree, dated December 17, 1807. Any neutral ship which touched at a British port, or submitted to search by a British cruiser, was declared to be

denationalised, and became a prize the moment it entered a French port.

The policy of the British Orders in Council was vehemently challenged at the time in the British Parliament, and it is still keenly criticised. It was declared to be unfair to neutrals and injurious to Great Britain. The Orders in Council, it was urged, simply made the Berlin decree effective, and so carried out Napoleon's policy. The severity with which the French and British decrees bore on neutrals is undeniable. America was perhaps the greatest sufferer by them, and the Government of the United States tried to punish both the offending Powers by passing a law of non-intercourse with Europe—a very futile legislative effort. Later still, the exasperation of the Orders in Council kindled the American war of 1812. But that Great Britain, in a struggle for existence, had a right to defend itself even by such a weapon as the Orders in Council, cannot be fairly denied. France herself compelled every neutral to be her accomplice; she required them to treat England as a hostile Power. It was absurd they should still expect to enjoy the security and privileges of neutrals.

The situation thus created tried the resources and endurance of both France and England in the highest degree; but, on the whole, France suffered most from the suppression of the neutral trade. France, to describe the situation in a sentence, put

England out of law; England declared France under universal blockade. Betwixt the two lines of sealed ports stood the neutral, whom both France and England joined in suppressing. But France, when she suppressed the neutral, was strangling an ally; England was only embarrassing a competitor.

Nothing is more striking than the fierce and ruthless energy with which Napoleon pushed his Continental system. Under the Treaty of Tilsit (July 8, 1807), Russia, the one Power which could have made the Berlin decree impossible, accepted it, and joined with Napoleon in forcing it on the smaller Powers. Both Prussia and Austria shut their ports against English trade. French troops took possession of such Italian ports as were not already absolutely under French influence, and kept guard in them against the approach of guilty British products. Denmark was required, under threat of instant occupation, to come within the Continental system.

It was impossible for a State so tiny to hold out against the compulsion of such mighty Powers as France and Russia; but as the Danish fleet would have been a dangerous weapon in the hands of Napoleon, a strong British squadron, with 27,000 troops, appeared in the early days of September 1807 before Copenhagen. After a bombardment lasting nearly three days that city surrendered, and eighteen Danish line-of-battle ships, which otherwise would soon have carried French crews and the French flag,

were borne off as "a deposit until the end of the war" to British dockyards. Spain already was in the palm of Napoleon. Portugal was required to take her choice betwixt war or the exclusion of British trade.

It is difficult to realise the despotic violence with which Napoleon, after the Treaty of Tilsit, thrust his commercial policy on the smaller Powers. Thus at a diplomatic reception in Paris on September 23, 1807—before, that is, the Orders in Council had appeared—Napoleon broke out on the Portuguese ambassador. "If Portugal," he said, "does not do what I wish, the House of Braganza will not be reigning in Europe in two months. I will no longer tolerate an English ambassador in Europe; I will declare war against any Power who receives one at his court after two months from this time. I have 300,000 Russians at my disposal, and with that powerful ally I can do everything. The English declare that they will no longer respect neutrals on the sea; I will no longer recognise them on the land." As a matter of fact, Junot at the head of a French army was already marching through Spain to seize Portugal. Pushing on at speed, he reached Lisbon on November 30, hoping to seize both the royal treasures and the Portuguese fleet. He arrived just too late; the royal family had embarked and sailed under the convoy of a British squadron for Brazil.

Napoleon looked upon the success of his Continental system as "a mathematical certainty;" and if he could have eliminated the factor of human nature from the problem, that sanguine calculation might have proved accurate. For a time it seemed to succeed. At the end of 1807 Continental Europe was either in alliance with Napoleon or helplessly under his power. He had turned Pitt's own policy against England. A new and all-including coalition had arisen, vaster in scale, subtler in strategy, more menacing in aspect than any of which the great English Minister had dreamed. But this time it was a coalition against England! Its inspiration was not British gold, but French bayonets. The only Power not controlled by Napoleon was Turkey, and, as it happened, that land of crazy politics was at that moment at war with England. "England," wrote Napoleon in triumph, "sees her merchandise repelled by all Europe, and her ships, loaded with useless wealth, seek in vain, from the Sound to the Hellespont, a port open to receive them."

And yet the Continental system failed, and in its failure destroyed its author. "For one thing, it was impossible to enforce a policy so monstrous—a policy which aimed at rending the civilised world in twain, and suspending intercourse betwixt the two fragments as absolutely as though they were separate planets moving in separate spheres." Napoleon's policy, even in the imperfect degree in which it

succeeded, involved enormous suffering; its success would almost have destroyed civilisation.

For the Continental nations, the forbidden trade represented nearly all the luxuries and many of the necessities of life. Within the zone of the Berlin decree prices rose enormously; outside was an eager and enterprising commerce. Sugar rose to 5s. per lb., coffee to 10s., a pair of cotton stockings sold for 7s. And since fashion values any article according, not to its beauty nor its utility, but only to its cost and rarity, the very articles forbidden became articles of luxury, and so were vehemently desired. Human nature, in a word—and especially the feminine part of it—was against Napoleon's Continental system! With high prices on one side of a paper barrier and cheap goods on the other, there followed the inevitable result—an enormous contraband trade. Never was smuggling practised on such a scale or with so much ingenuity and daring. The sea-coast populations almost everywhere joined in one vast conspiracy to defeat Napoleon's policy. Great Britain herself seized Heligoland, and made it a great depot for cargoes waiting to be smuggled into Continental ports.

Napoleon, on his part, tried to enforce his decree with cruel and unsparing energy. Death was the punishment imposed for all serious breaches of the regulations against British goods. Bourrienne records that at Hamburg under Davoust an unhappy

German was shot for having introduced into his house a little loaf-sugar to sweeten a dish for his children. In one of Napoleon's letters, omitted from the edition published by Napoleon III., the French Emperor directs Soult, in command at St. Omer, to "have the crew and gear of the fishing-boat which communicated with the English seized at once. Make the skipper speak. . . . If he should seem to hesitate, squeeze his thumbs in the hammer of a musket." "Send me a general report on all the smugglers," writes Napoleon to Fouché on May 26, 1808. "Could we not get eight or ten millions out of them? What means can we take of bringing them to justice." That quotation very happily illustrates Napoleon's methods. He would shoot these smugglers ruthlessly, or even torture them. But if both bullets and torture failed, then "Could we not get eight or ten millions out of them?"

As a matter of fact, Napoleon was himself the greatest smuggler in Europe. At the very moment when he shot an unhappy German for giving his children a few lumps of loaf-sugar, he was, in violation of his own decree, selling licences for the importation of thousands of tons of that same commodity. Thus the author of the Berlin decree entered into partnership with the smugglers engaged in defeating it. Bourrienne, then the French Resident at Hamburg, records how in a single year he clandestinely admitted into that town English goods

of the value of 60,000,000 francs, on which a duty of 33 per cent. was paid directly to Napoleon, realising a sum of 20,000,000 francs.

Napoleon himself could not do without the goods he pretended to exclude. He had to smuggle goods on his own account to clothe and equip his armies! "The French army which marched to Eylau," says Green, "was clad in greatcoats made at Leeds and shod with shoes made at Northampton." Bourrienne tells how, "shortly after the Berlin decree had been issued, there arrived at Hamburg an order for the immediate supply of 50,000 greatcoats, 200,000 pairs of shoes, 16,000 coats, 37,000 waistcoats, &c." After trying in vain in every other quarter, Bourrienne had to make a contract with English manufacturers for these articles. "Thus," says Alison, "while the Emperor was denouncing the severest penalties against the possession of English goods, his own army was arrayed in the cloths of Leeds and Halifax, and his soldiers would have perished amidst the snows of Preussich-Eylau but for the efforts of British industry." It is possible to suspect the patriotism of these British manufacturers who thus took contracts to equip a hostile army; but the incident, at least, proves the essential absurdity of Napoleon's Continental system.

In still other ways Napoleon contrived both to forbid English trade and to extract millions out of it. He seized enormous quantities of smuggled

goods and confiscated them. In the Hanse towns alone, Bourrienne says, he compounded with the owners of English goods, which had been seized at a single swoop, for £800,000. The value of American ships and cargoes sequestrated between April 1809 and April 1810 was not less than 10,000,000 dollars. It is a humorous proof of Napoleon's subtlety that he first allowed goods to be smuggled into the forbidden zone on secret payment of the stupendous duty of 50 per cent., and then suddenly, and at the same moment, over entire districts, seized and confiscated the very goods on which he had been paid huge and clandestine duties.

But the administration of the Continental system grew ever sterner. It was less and less sweetened by the caprice of "licences" or the ingenuity of smuggling. Bourrienne is, if not the most trustworthy, yet the most graphic witness to the manner in which the Continental system was worked. In October 1810, Napoleon issued a decree directing that throughout France, and in all countries under French military occupation, British goods, when seized, should be publicly burned; and the smoke of those avenging fires went up over half Europe. "Persons who at this epoch," says Bourrienne, "were living in the interior of France can form no idea of the desolation which so savage a measure spread through countries accustomed to live by commerce. What a spectacle offered to peoples impoverished,

and lacking everything, to see the burning of articles the distribution of which would have been an alleviation to their sufferings! What a means of attaching conquered peoples, to irritate their privations by the destruction of a number of articles of the first necessity!"

The Continent suffered, perhaps, almost as much from the British Orders in Council as from Napoleon's Berlin decree; but the resentment kindled by these sufferings was directed much more strongly against Napoleon than against England. England, it was seen, was fighting for existence; Napoleon for conquest. "The general common sense of the masses, outside France at all events, realised that the Berlin decree was issued by Napoleon—to quote ~~Lamfey~~—"for the purpose of destroying the only nation which had resisted him successfully and which still fought for popular freedom." The terror of Napoleon's name lay heavy on the imagination of the nations, but side by side with that terror, says Bourrienne, "was that damnable Continental system, which settled the question. "It was necessary either to fight or to succumb." The Berlin decree, ~~Lamfey~~ declares, "bound Europe invincibly and eternally to England."
... No measure contributed more to raise the populations against us and to hasten the fall of the imperial régime." In Germany, says Senfft, "the Continental system contributed more than the conquest itself to kindle the populations against Napoleon."

But if the sufferings of the Continental system turned the "dim common millions" of the poor against Napoleon, the steps Napoleon took to seal the Continent along its whole coast-line against England drove the rulers of every nation to make common cause against him. The policy of the Berlin decree, they at last realised, meant that their independence must perish in order that the trade of England might be destroyed.

In Holland, Louis Napoleon resisted the decree, and declared its policy to be "atrocious" and "barbarous." It would not merely ruin Holland; with keener insight than his more famous brother, Louis saw that the decree would "effect the ruin of France and all commercial nations connected with it before it could ruin England." In the end, Louis abdicated rather than accept the policy of the Berlin decree, and Holland was dissolved into a cluster of French departments. Along the northern sea-coast of Europe the line of French occupation was steadily pushed. The mouths of the Elbe and the Weser were seized. Stettin and Danzig were occupied. The coast, from Boulogne to the Baltic, bristled with bayonets, like one huge, curving, many-leagued chevaux-de-frise, intended to repel the invasion of guilty British trade.

It was this unceasing advance of French occupation along the sea-board which at last brought Napoleon into conflict with Russia and wrecked the conspiracy

of Tilsit. Russia bore with scant patience the sufferings and losses involved in the commercial war with England. The foreign trade of Russia was destroyed by it. The nobles found their revenues, the merchants their profits, dwindling to the vanishing-point. And in Russia general discontent is apt to express itself in assassination! In addition, the Czar watched uneasily the line of French sentries creeping along the northern seas to his own borders. As Alexander grew sulky, Napoleon became more exacting. Napoleon at last took military occupation of a zone of coastal district, fifty miles broad, running from Lübeck to Bremen, and thence to the frontiers of Holland. This took in the little duchy of Oldenburg, of which the ruler was a member of Alexander's own family. This event brought the Czar's displeasure to a climax. He had already refused to enforce the later and harsher measures of Napoleon in support of the Continental system; and on December 30, 1810—less than a month, that is, after Napoleon had annexed the duchy of Oldenburg—the Czar issued a ukase which enlarged the liberties of neutrals, and practically excluded some branches of French manufactures.

“This,” wrote Napoleon to Alexander, “is specially directed against France.” He urged the Czar, in peremptory accents, to seize 600 neutral ships then in Russian ports, flying flags of many tints, but, as Napoleon declared, “all of them English.” “If you

admit them," he wrote, "the war still lasts. If you confiscate them, we shall have peace." But Alexander refused to confiscate them. "If you abandon the alliance and burn the Convention of Tilsit," Napoleon wrote again, "war must follow a few months sooner or later." That forecast was perfectly accurate. Napoleon, moreover, was a prophet who had the power of translating his own prophecies into history. Russia, thus, represents the breaking-point in the tremendous tension of the Continental system. Napoleon in the last resort could not put sufficient pressure on the great Northern Power to keep it patient under the strain and sufferings of that system. So came the flames of Moscow, the horrors of the Russian retreat, and the general rising of Europe against Napoleon.

But in the south of Europe, as well as in the north, the Continental system broke down. Napoleon had seized Spain, partly that he might put another Bonaparte on a throne, but partly also that he might shut the whole coast-line of the Peninsula—including Portugal—against England. "My mission," Junot proclaimed, as he marched on Lisbon, "is to close that great port against the English." But the royal House of Portugal fled to Brazil, and the Spaniards rose in savage and inextinguishable revolt against the French occupation. The Spanish war—obstinate, bloody, ignoble, a campaign of ambushes and assassinations rather than of battles—wearied

Napoleon; but he could not abandon Spain without abandoning his Continental system. "I no longer hold to Joseph being king of Spain," he once said to Duroc; "and he himself cares little about it. I would place there the first-comer if he would close his ports to the English."

The struggle in Spain compelled Napoleon to make a fatal division of his strength. He must hold Madrid against Wellington at the moment he was marching on Moscow against Alexander. And Spain gave to England a field for a military contest with Napoleon of the most favourable character. The sea washed its shores on three sides, and the sea was a safe and easy base of supplies for a British army. The rugged geography of the Peninsula lent itself to the tactics of a comparatively small army contending with forces much more numerous, but broken up into widely separated fragments. Moreover, in Spain the English had a nation in revolt as an ally. England had no further need to fight Napoleon through a coalition. In the Peninsula she found at last a battle-field in which she could array her own soldiers against the battalions of Napoleon under something like equal conditions; and the victories and sieges of Wellington for the next five years tell how that great opportunity was used.

Thus, in the last analysis, it was the Continental system which gave Spain to England as a battle-ground. The troubles kindled by that system kept

Napoleon fighting in Russia, while his marshals were being overthrown by Wellington in Spain. And the popular rising in Spain, it is to be noted, is answered by a popular rising in Germany. "Through these five years [betwixt Tilsit and the breach with Russia] a European party of insurrection," says Seeley, "is gradually forming. It has two great divisions, one scattered through Germany, at the head of which Austria placed herself in 1809; the other in Spain and Portugal, which is aided by England. In Germany this movement is successfully repressed until 1813, but in the Peninsula it gains ground steadily from 1809. After 1812 both movements swell the great anti-Napoleonic revolution which then sets in."

CHAPTER XVIII

A PROCESSION OF ADVENTURES

NO picture of what may be called the physiognomy of the great struggle at this period is complete, which does not give some examples of the many irrelevant and absurd expeditions undertaken, at irregular intervals, by the British Government. The general strategy of the war on the English side was maintained with a sort of unconscious constancy, a constancy bred rather of instinct than of reasoned purpose. The central fact that the struggle was one of sea-power as against land-power determined the general features of the conflict. The aim of England was to isolate her great antagonist, to destroy its commerce, blockade its ports, capture its colonies, and so drain it of its very life-blood. A modern nation cut off from the sea with its commerce must, in process of time, die of mere exhaustion. This general policy, we repeat, England maintained with the dogged perseverance natural to her character; and it was a policy in the end which triumphed.

But a hundred sporadic expeditions were begun which had no relation to the general plan of the war;

which involved the waste of thousands of gallant lives and millions of money, and which were commonly miracles of stupidity in conception, and of shabby failure in execution. The colonies of France and its allies were almost invariably captured during war and surrendered when peace arrived; and sometimes the process was repeated with an iteration half humorous and half tragical. Thus Martinique was thrice captured and thrice surrendered; with Guadeloupe the same double process was gone through no less than five times. Java, one of the richest islands in the world, was captured in the same way, and given back again by a statesman who did not know even its whereabouts. This period of the long strife is rich in performances of this type—expeditions which were mere irrelevant adventures, that cost much but meant nothing and accomplished nothing.

The Ministry of all the Talents was singularly unhappy in its warlike operations. It was responsible for Duckworth's failure in the Dardanelles; for Fraser's bloody and inglorious disasters in Egypt; for the shame of Whitelocke's performances in Buenos Ayres, and for the melancholy story of the Walcheren expedition.

Late in 1805, for example, a squadron under the command of Sir Home Popham, with 5000 troops under Sir David Baird, was despatched for the purpose of making a descent on the Cape of Good Hope, then owned by the Dutch. The Cape had been

once captured already during the progress of the war, and in 1802 had been handed back to the United Provinces in the fashion so familiar to British diplomacy. Popham sighted Table Land on January 3, 1806. The Dutch troops holding the Cape numbered 5000, under General Jansens; but Baird, a much-experienced Scottish soldier, did his business in a very workmanlike fashion, and at the cost of little bloodshed. Thirty-five of the 93rd Highlanders were drowned in the landing, but only fifteen British soldiers were killed in the engagement which added the Cape as a permanent possession to the British Empire. One picturesque incident marked the capitulation of the Dutch. A fine French frigate, *La Volontaire*, sailed into Table Bay in ignorance of the fact that the colony had changed owners. The approach of the Frenchman had been discovered, and the British ships of war hoisted Dutch colours to further deceive the unfortunate captain of *La Volontaire*, who, with much simplicity, dropped anchor in the middle of his enemies and fired a polite salute in their honour. *La Volontaire*, it may be added, was a specially acceptable prize. She had on board two companies of the 54th, which she had taken in a British transport she had made her prize in the Bay of Biscay.

Sir Home Popham was a man of erratic genius and immeasurable vanity. He found himself in command of a strong squadron and a small army, and beyond

the reach of the Admiralty, and he conceived the plan of undertaking some conquest on his own account. Buenos Ayres, a fat and easy prize, seemed to be within his reach. Popham persuaded Baird to join in the adventure, picked up some reinforcements at St. Helena under Major-General Beresford, and on June 16, 1806, this highly irregular expedition was off Monte Video. The British landed 1700 men on June 25. Some 2000 Spaniards stood in their path; their guns stuck hopelessly in a morass; but the 71st, with an angry bayonet charge, drove the Spaniards off in hasty retreat. Beresford pushed on, the Spanish viceroy fled, and on the 27th Buenos Ayres, a city of 70,000 inhabitants, surrendered to this mere handful of British troops. In the public treasury was found over 1,300,000 dollars, and this comfortable prize was promptly despatched to England.

For three weeks the British held Buenos Ayres, and during that time the Spaniards had the opportunity of counting their conquerors. It dawned on the Spanish imagination at last that a city of 70,000 people ought not to have been captured by a mere handful of red-coats. The city rose. Spanish irregulars poured into it along all the country roads. Beresford found himself besieged; his supplies were cut off, and he had to capitulate.

Sir Home Popham, in the interval, had sailed off with the 43rd to attack Monte Video. He changed his erratic purpose, and made a descent on the town of

Maldonada, some seventy-eight miles distant from Monte Video, which he duly captured. Meanwhile the news of Sir Home Popham's surprising exploit reached London, and the Admiralty, which had suffered much at that officer's hands, promptly recalled him, but despatched some troops under Sir Samuel Achmuty to continue the expedition Sir Home Popham had begun in so irregular a fashion. Sir Home Popham fared ill in the court-martial which followed; he was "severely reprimanded" for having abandoned his post without orders.

Monte Video was desperately held against Sir Samuel Achmuty, but he had some good regiments—the 38th, the 40th, the 47th, the 81st, the 87th—and, with a daring such as was afterwards shown on the great breach at Badajos and under the walls of San Sebastian, they captured Monte Video; but in the column of the stormers alone no less than 600 men fell. The English Government, finding itself committed to the conquest of Spanish America, resolved, in the dogged fashion characteristic of the race, to persevere; and in May 1807 General Craufurd, with 5000 additional troops, made his appearance on the coast to take charge of the operations. Craufurd was a fiery soldier, with a real genius for war, who won fame afterwards in the Peninsula, and who fell in the assault on Ciudad Rodrigo. He had some 11,000 troops under his command, an army equal to that which under Abercromby drove the French out

of Egypt. Had the business been left to Craufurd, Spanish South America would probably to-day be a British possession.

But Craufurd, on June 15, was superseded by General Whitelocke, one of the most unfortunate names in British military history. Whitelocke had nothing of the general but the hat, and nothing of the soldier but his coat. That he had shown the "white feather" in the West Indies was notorious; but no one had guessed of what degrees of mingled cowardice and stupidity Whitelocke was capable until the British authorities generously gave him this opportunity of demonstrating these qualities on a great stage.

On June 28 the army landed; on July 5 Buenos Ayres was assaulted; on the next day Whitelocke practically capitulated with his entire force! Never before or since was dishonour accomplished with so much expedition.

Buenos Ayres was a city of stone houses with flat roofs, and Spaniards, if once their passions are kindled, excel in desperate street-fighting, as the story of Saragossa shows. In this case the surrender of Beresford had given to Spanish pride the necessary prick, and a desperate fight was assured. Whitelocke broke his men up into small and unrelated detachments, sent them into the town with unloaded arms, and took no steps for maintaining any communication between his scattered and tiny columns.

The troops were required to attack not only with unloaded, but, in some cases, with flintless muskets. The general order was that the soldiers were not to load or fire till the separate columns had reached the Great Plaza of Buenos Ayres, and formed one body. But some companies of the 88th were discovered to have their muskets loaded; upon which, as a short and effective way of rendering their firearms useless, they were deprived of their flints. When, before or since, were soldiers required to march in disconnected fragments, with empty or flintless muskets, through streets in which every house was a fortress pouring on them a tempest of bullets!

A rain of fire broke from roof and window on each of the unhappy columns, armed only with empty muskets. One dwindled to the dimensions of a company and then surrendered; the others, at the cost of dreadful slaughter, pushed their desperate and bloody way to the Plaza de Toros. More than 70 officers and 1000 rank and file were shot down; over 1500 British soldiers were taken prisoners; but even after this disaster Whitelocke held two strong posts in the town. He had 5000 good soldiers in hand and a strong fleet as his base. His troops were in a savage mood, and though their losses had been murderous, the city now lay practically at their mercy. But at this stage the Spanish general sent in a letter offering to give up all his prisoners, including those taken under Beresford, if the British would abandon opera-

tions and leave the coast. Whitelocke meekly accepted these terms, marched his disgusted and almost mutinous army to his ships, and sailed off—to everlasting infamy.

Craufurd, according to “Rifleman Harris,” was so enraged with his general that he ordered his Rifles to “shoot the traitor dead” if they caught sight of him in the streets of Buenos! He deserved to be shot more than Byng a thousand times over, and that he escaped that fate is one more proof of the lower standard of conduct which public opinion in Great Britain at that day applied to the army, as compared with the navy. An admiral who had played Whitelocke’s part on the sea would certainly have been shot with the utmost promptitude, and with universal public approval, on his own quarter-deck. For years a favourite toast at every British mess was, “Success to grey hairs, but bad luck to white-locks!” The unfortunate general was tried by court-martial, cashiered, and declared “totally unfit and unworthy to serve His Majesty in any military capacity whatever.” But it is curious that the British Government only discovered this sufficiently obvious fact by the bloody experiment of Buenos Ayres.

One incident of Whitelocke’s after-history has, somehow, survived. So late as 1830, in an English country inn, he had invited the landlord to take a glass of wine with him. The landlord accepted an invitation so congenial, but presently learned the

name of his entertainer. Lifting his glass high in air, he dashed it to fragments, and vowed he was dishonoured by sitting at the same table with the man who had betrayed his country at Buenos Ayres!

At the beginning of 1807 Turkey had fallen under Napoleon's spell, and its fleet, it was plain, would soon be turned, by his matchless art, against England. It was determined by the British Cabinet to employ the measures used at Copenhagen against Constantinople. The Turkish fleet was to be taken possession of until the end of the war, in order that it might not become a pawn on the chess-board of Napoleon's plans. Probably, however, the most unsuitable man in the British navy was employed on this task, and he was supplied with a totally inadequate force. It was as though Sir Hyde Parker at Copenhagen in 1801 had not only been without Nelson, but without half his fleet! With so much perverted ingenuity was failure made certain!

On February 10, 1807, Sir John Duckworth was anchored off the Isle of Tenedos with a squadron consisting of eight ships of the line and three frigates. His flagship was the ill-fated *Royal George*; in the squadron was the *Franklin*, captured at the Nile, and now bearing the name of the *Canopus*, and carrying the flag of Sir Thomas Louis; the *Pompée*, captured at Toulon, carried the flag of Sir Sidney Smith. The squadron was to force the Dardanelles, demand the surrender of the Turkish fleet of twelve

sail of the line and nine frigates—a fleet, that is, much stronger than itself, and lying under the defence of the strongest fortifications in Europe. Collingwood, plain sailor as he was, understood Turkish diplomacy. In his instructions to Duckworth he wrote, “No negotiations should continue more than half-an-hour;” at the end of that period the guns were to speak! It was at this vital point of his instructions Duckworth unhappily failed.

On February 11 Duckworth was off the mouth of the Dardanelles, but dropped anchor there for five days, meditating on the task before him. It was difficult, no doubt. Here was a channel twelve leagues long, and at points less than two miles wide; at one point, indeed, it was only three-quarters of a mile in width, the narrowest part being guarded by what are called the inner castles of Europe and Asia. When these twelve perilous leagues are passed, Constantinople is still a hundred miles off across the Sea of Marmora; and that sea, as Duckworth wrote, somewhat ruefully, was “environed with enemies.” Whilst waiting here, one of the finest ships in Duckworth’s squadron—the *Ajax*, under Captain Blackwood—took fire, burnt all through the night of the 14th, and blew up in the morning, 250 of her crew perishing.

On February 19 Duckworth grasped his nettle. He entered the long, narrow Dardanelles in line of battle, the *Canopus* leading. The castles on both

sides of the Strait thundered at the slowly-gliding ships; but, with the loss of less than sixty killed and wounded, the squadron ran the gauntlet of the guns. Immediately above the castle of Abydos lay part of the Turkish fleet—a line-of-battle ship, eight frigates and eorvettes, and some brigs. These opened fire on the advancing British; but part of the squadron, under Sir Sidney Smith, closed on them promptly, and in half-an-hour the Turkish ships were destroyed, only four British seamen being killed and twenty-six wounded. On the 20th Duckworth anchored off Constantinople; and here he should have promptly employed Collingwood's recipe of "one half-hour of negotiations." Instead of this, the British admiral spent ten days in that business, the Turks meanwhile, under French engineers, toiling energetically to lock the Dardanelles behind Duckworth, and thus bar the door by which he had entered. Turkish diplomatists may be trusted to out-lie and bewilder a somewhat thick-headed British sailor; but at the end of ten days Duckworth awoke to the discovery that to attack the Turkish fleet was already impossible, while to carry his own squadron through the Dardanelles was rapidly becoming impossible.

On March 3 the British squadron, to secure its escape, had once more to run the gauntlet of the Dardanelles. On approaching the castle of Abydos, Duckworth, by way of soothing Turkish susceptibilities, fired a courtesy salute of thirteen guns, and

was promptly answered by a tempest of shot and shell. From Pesques Point, for a distance of four miles beyond Abydos, the Straits narrow to two miles, and were barred by heavy batteries, including the famous guns throwing stone shot. These guns, huge masses of metal, lay in a fixed position; they were fired only when the object to be struck moved under their gaping muzzles. They flung huge masses of rounded granite, approaching half a ton in weight, and when one of these tremendous missiles did hit, the damage done was terrific.

One of these stone shot, for example, struck the *Repulse*, passed through betwixt the poop and quarter-deck, wounded the mainmast, carried away the wheel, and killed or wounded twenty men. Another stone shot of 800 pounds weight carried away the cutwater of the *Royal George*; a third cut through the mainmast of the *Windsor Castle* as though it had been a switch, and killed or wounded sixteen men. Yet another stone ball, weighing 770 pounds, and measuring 6 ft. 8 in. in circumference, entered the lower deck of the *Standard* and exploded some powder boxes, the total loss by this single shot amounting to fifty-five men killed and wounded. A granite shot, again, passed clean through the *Active*, curiously enough, without injuring a man, but making a breach so huge that the captain of the injured ship, looking over its side to ascertain the damage, saw two of his crew thrusting their heads together through the

hole. The squadron lost 167 men in its repassage of the Dardanelles.

Those huge granite shot probably saved Sir John Duckworth's reputation. They curiously impressed the popular imagination, and people forgot to inquire why Sir John lingered ten days off Constantinople instead of opening fire at the end of Collingwood's "half-hour negotiations." Delay is fatal when the Turk is the enemy to be attacked.

CHAPTER XIX

FROM EGYPT TO SICILY

SIR THOMAS DUCKWORTH'S adventure in the Dardanelles is, however, but the first incident in a catalogue of adventures which the British, with a healthy self-respect, have contrived to almost completely cast out of the cells of their memory.

Great Britain, at the cost of much blood and treasure, had driven the French out of Egypt in 1801, and had handed the country back to its Turkish masters. Since, in the witches' dance of politics, Turkey was now the ally of France, it occurred to the English Cabinet that it might be well to turn the Turks out of Egypt on their own account. But here, again, the task was committed to an incompetent leader and an inadequate force.

On 6th March 1807, a British squadron, with 5000 troops under Major-General Fraser, sailed from Messina for Egypt, and on the nightfall of the 16th the squadron was anchored off the entrance of the western harbour of Alexandria. Alexandria was held by a very scanty garrison. The troops landed, carried the enemy's advanced works, and on the 21st

the city surrendered, with a total loss to the British of seventeen killed and wounded. Two fine Turkish frigates and a corvette lying in the harbour became prizes. On the 22nd Duckworth arrived with his squadron, and it was determined to attack Rosetta, a city of narrow streets, and dingy, flat-roofed, red-brick houses, surrounded by a low wall.

Major-General Wauchope, with the 31st and the Chasseurs Britannique, attacked the town. No use was made of artillery. Wauchope's attack consisted in marching his two regiments in solid column into the narrow streets of Rosetta. When entangled there in a labyrinth of lanes, a close and deadly fire was opened on the soldiers from a hundred house roofs. Wauchope fell dead, and the regiments struggled out, leaving 400 of their number behind, and fell back on Alexandria. The Turks found a grim use for the slain British soldiers. Their heads were cut off and placed on stakes along either side of the road leading into the town, the ill-fated Wauchope's head among the rest.

Another attacking force was organised; it consisted of 2500 men, and included the 35th, a second battalion of the 78th Highlanders, and a body of seamen. Rosetta was by this time occupied by a strong force from Cairo, and once more, with monumental stupidity, the English troops were thrust into the narrow streets, where discipline was useless and all advantages of position lay with the Turks. A few

guns would have driven the Turks from Rosetta; but though the British had artillery, they made no use of it. They flung themselves into the blind and crooked alleys of Rosetta with the unreasoning and furious courage of bulldogs. The fighting was of the most stubborn character. A sergeant of the 78th, according to tradition, slew seven Turks with his claymore before himself falling. Of the British, no less than 1000 were slaughtered, or nearly one-half of the entire force. The Highland battalion consisted of 275 men, of whom only 30 survived, 15 of these being wounded. The British fell back once more to Alexandria, and new British heads in hundreds were perched on fresh stakes along the road which led to Rosetta.

Fraser had no energy to attempt a fresh stroke. He occupied Alexandria till September 14, and then capitulated on terms which enabled him to sail with the survivors of his expedition back to Messina, having achieved no other feat than that of supplying Rosetta with a long palisade of British heads.

In 1807 comes the second expedition to Copenhagen, an exploit which had at least some moral justification. Napoleon and Alexander had met on the raft at Tilsit: thence followed two treaties, one known and published, the other shrouded in profound secrecy. The treaties, taken together, knitted the two masters of the Continent into a conspiracy against the rest of the world, and chiefly against

Great Britain. Unless Great Britain accepted terms of peace dictated by the Czar, it was to be treated as the common enemy, and the two Emperors were to issue a joint declaration of war on December 1. All the smaller neutral states were to be compelled to rank themselves under the banner of the two Emperors.

The English Cabinet learned the existence of the secret treaty. It was clear that the Danish fleet would be seized and turned against England, and Canning resolved to repeat in 1807 the feat achieved by Nelson in 1801. On August 4 a British fleet under Gambier dropped anchor off Copenhagen. This time there was no Nelson to speak for England from the iron lips of his guns; but the expedition included 20,000 good troops under Cathcart, with Wellesley as one of the divisional commanders. It is needless to linger over the details of this expedition. Copenhagen was bombarded. Wellesley, with characteristic skill and thoroughness, defeated the Danish troops at Kiøge, and on September 5 Copenhagen surrendered, and the Danish fleet, consisting of sixteen ships of the line, nine frigates, fourteen sloops, and many smaller vessels, with ninety transports laden with naval stores, was brought to England, the total loss to the British being less than 300 killed and wounded.

The business brought much temporary discredit on the English Cabinet, since it acted on evidence

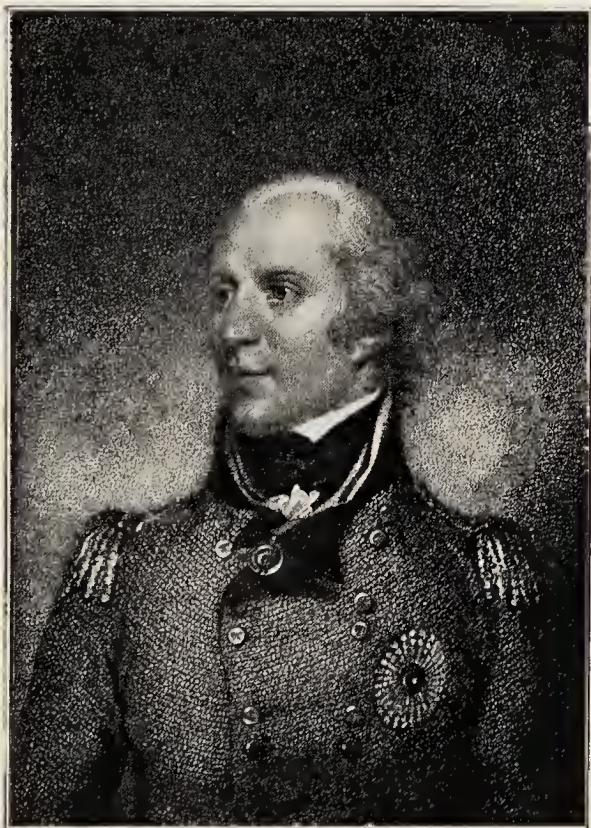
as to the existence of the secret treaty which it could not publish. Both Napoleon and Alexander denied with much virtuous indignation the existence of any such treaty. But the treaty existed. The danger to England was real, and while the expedition bore hardly on Denmark, it was justified, as far as Great Britain was concerned, by the law of self-preservation. History, however, soon fades, and perhaps the expedition to Copenhagen in 1807 keeps its place in British memory by virtue of one somewhat absurd detail. Lord Rosslyn took a favourite mare to Copenhagen, and rode it during the operations there. After he returned to England the mare produced a colt, which, owing to the circumstances of its birth, was named Copenhagen, and eight years afterwards became historic by virtue of the fact that it carried the Duke of Wellington through the long day of terror and glory at Waterloo.

The conspiracy of the two Emperors led to another expedition of a much more imbecile character. It was deemed desirable to assist Sweden against Russia and France, and in April 1808, Sir John Moore, with 14,000 troops, was despatched to Gothenburg. He had no particular instructions, except that he was not to put himself under command of the King of Sweden, or engage in any enterprise far from the coast. An army of 14,000 splendid troops, under an able general, employed at some point of strategic importance, might have yielded historic results. But

as a feat of pure folly, nothing could well be more complete than the despatch of such a force, with such instructions, to Sweden. The King of Sweden, as a matter of fact, was a lunatic. On the arrival of the British fleet, the troops were forbidden to land. Moore spent three distressful months in debates with the insane monarch, who invented one crazy design after another, and ended by arresting the British general himself. Moore had to make an ignoble midnight escape from Stockholm, reached his ships as a fugitive, and carried his troops—who had never been allowed to land—back to England again.

That the King of Sweden was a madman was a singularly happy circumstance for England. Had he been sane, Moore's fine army would have landed, only to have been destroyed in a remote and impossible enterprise. As it was, the army was saved to take part in the great campaigns in the Peninsula. But it is a curious fact that Great Britain owed this advantage, not to the wisdom of its Ministers, but to the fortunate lunacy of the King of Sweden!

An adventure almost as meaningless, but of more brilliant fortune, is that of Sir John Stuart in Calabria. Napoleon had turned Italy into a kingdom for his brother Joseph; but Sicily, ringed in the blue waters of the Mediterranean, was a province which the French found it difficult either to get or to hold. The narrow Straits of Messina, since the British had command of the sea, were almost as impassable to



SIR JOHN STUART

From an engraving after the miniature by WILLIAM WOOD

the French as though they had been barred by gates of steel. Sicily, in fact, was garrisoned by the British in 1808, and was practically administered by Lord William Bentinck from 1811 to 1814, as British Envoy Extraordinary. The half-savage Calabrians, meanwhile, were carrying on a guerilla warfare against the French in Italy itself. It was resolved to aid these wild hill-clans; and, with practically a single division of infantry, Great Britain set foot on the Continent to meet the forces which had overthrown Austria and Russia.

On June 30, some 5000 British troops, under Sir John Stuart, crossed the Straits from Sicily, and anchored in the Bay of St. Eufemio. The troops included the 27th, the 58th, the 78th Highlanders, the 81st, with two foreign regiments in the British service. Stuart's "cavalry" consisted of a handful of Sidney Smith's middies mounted on donkeys. This tiny force was to assist the Calabrians in their warfare with the French. It was too modest in scale to accomplish anything, yet too precious to be flung away; and it succeeded, in its brief career, in adding one shining victory to the British records.

General Regnier commanded the French forces in Calabria, and on news of the English landing he promptly marched down to the coast to destroy or capture the audacious invaders. On July 1, Stuart's little force was marching along the coast, through broken and wooded country, towards Maida, the prin-

cial town in the district. In front of Maida, Stuart found Regnier drawn up in a strong position, with 5000 good troops; the two tiny armies confronting each other thus being about of equal force. But Regnier occupied an almost unassailable position, and 3000 men, under Monteleone, were marching at speed to join him. He had only to play a waiting game, and Stuart must surrender or embark. But Regnier was an impatient leader. Stuart and he had fought against each other in Egypt; the Frenchman had a defeat to avenge, and, full of pride in his war-hardened veterans, he left his position on the hill, and marched down to meet and overthrow Stuart on the plain, where, moreover, his cavalry could act effectively.

Stuart advanced cheerfully to meet his enemy. His right wing was composed of the light companies of the regiments under his command, formed into a separate brigade under Kempt, who afterwards fought at Waterloo. The 78th and 81st, under Acland, formed Stuart's centre; and the 27th and a Grenadier battalion, under Lowry Cole, formed his left. Monteleone's troops had just reached Regnier's battle-line, and that general, with 8000 French veterans, came on with eager confidence against Stuart, who was able to put less than 5000 men into battle formation. The prestige of a hundred victories was on the side of the French, but the imagination of a British soldier, when he sees his enemy before him,

is not apt to be impressed by a consideration so intangible. The skirmishers on both sides were already smartly at work. Low brushwood screened the British right, and Regnier sent his best troops, the 1st Leger, against Kempt's light companies holding that position. A hot Italian sun was smiting Kempt's ranks; the men, forcing their way through the brushwood and across sandy soil, suffered greatly. The British soldier of that date, it must be remembered, went into action carrying on his back, or hung round his body, a kit and equipment which weighed from seventy-five to eighty pounds; and thus Kempt's light companies, mainly composed of young soldiers, were badly handicapped.

But Kempt was a cool-brained soldier. The shakos of the 1st Leger were already visible, a long and serried line, above the brushwood. Kempt halted his men and ordered them to throw off their blankets and knapsacks. A sharp word of command; they fell into line again and pressed eagerly forward. In both lines the bayonets were thrown forward for the charge, and, with bent heads and a tumult of shouts, the lines closed on each other. The French, in their many battles with Continental troops, had learned to use the bayonet, and to trust in it, and they confidently expected to sweep the right wing of the British off the field with a bayonet-charge pushed home.

There is no test of soldierly courage equal to

that of the actual push of the glittering steel. The two long threatening lines of gleaming points come fiercely on. One or other must give way, and the line yields which has, perhaps, not least courage, but most of susceptible imagination. In this case, just as the lines seemed to meet—at one or two points of the irregular formation, indeed, steel was already ringing harshly on steel—when the French line slackened its pace. A quiver of irresolution ran down it. It seemed to crumple up; it broke into fragments. In another moment it was in flight!

The centre, under Acland, at the same time came fiercely on with rolling volleys that seemed to scorch the French centre out of existence. The centre, indeed, executed a bayonet charge as brilliant and decisive as that of Kempt on their right. Opposed to the Highlanders was the 42nd Imperial Grenadiers, and the Highlanders flung themselves on these famous troops with a Celtic vehemence that swept them away in mere rout. Macleod, who commanded the 78th, was shot through the breast by a rifle-ball; but, leaning from his saddle on the shoulder of one of his sergeants, he yet led on his men, and survived even a wound so dreadful; for the bullet passed within an inch of his heart!

On the left the fighting was more equal, and Regnier launched his small force of cavalry, 300 dragoons, in a charge which threatened to break up the British formation at this point. Just at this

moment, however, the 20th, under Colonel Ross, came into action. The transport carrying this regiment dropped anchor just as the first smoke of the battle was going up. The men tumbled eagerly into their boats, and came at the double through the brushwood. By happy chance, they reached the British left just as the French cavalry were about to charge, and the dragoons were driven summarily off by a steady volley from the muskets of the 20th.

Regnier's defeat was bloody, and Stuart's pursuit fierce. The battle, in fact, cost the French, in killed, wounded, and prisoners, 3000 men, while the British lost only 300. Stuart won by sheer hard and close fighting a brilliant victory. Had his army been adequately reinforced, he might have held the whole of South Italy against the French, and so have influenced gravely the Continental campaign; for Jena was not yet fought. But he was left without support, and was finally withdrawn, and Maida remained a fruitless victory, except for its effect in shattering French prestige and adding a new and happy tradition to British military history.

Another daring and brilliant exploit of the "adventure" order is supplied by the navy of this period. On November 22, 1806, three British frigates, the *Arethusa*, the *Latona*, and the *Anson*, were cruising off the island of Curaçoa, Captain Brisbane flying his commodore's flag from the *Arethusa*. That night another frigate, the *Fisgard*, on its way to Jamaica,

fell in with the squadron. The four captains put their reckless sailors' heads together, and conceived the idea of carrying Curaçoa by a *coup de main*. St. Ann, the chief port of the island, at that moment held four Dutch ships of war, and was defended by powerful and extensive fortifications, Fort Amsterdam, at the entrance of the harbour, alone mounting sixty guns. The attempt was one, in brief, which nobody but four British frigate-captains, with no admiral present to enforce a decorous prudence, would have dreamed of making. But Brisbane, their leader, with a sailor's practical imagination, calculated upon the Dutch habit of drinking the old year out and the new year in. On the night of December 31, he guessed almost the entire garrison of St. Ann's would be in various stages of drunkenness.

The four frigates accordingly, on that night, ran boldly to the narrow entrance, scarcely fifty fathoms wide, and crowned by heavy batteries, through which the harbour of St. Ann is reached. At 5 A.M. they were passing through the entrance. The astonished Dutchmen fired frantically at their enemies, but made miraculously bad shooting. The *Fisgard* grounded, and could render no further help, but Brisbane pushed up the harbour until the jib-boom of the *Arethusa* thrust itself over the wall of the town. Then he sent an officer ashore demanding instant surrender, and giving the amazed Dutch governor "five minutes to make up his mind." But

what Dutch mind is capable of being made up in a space of time so brief? No answer came back, and Brisbane instantly opened fire on the Dutch frigates, and then carried them by boarding. Brisbane next, with the boats of the *Arethusa* and the *Latona*, landed; his tars, cutlass in hand, swarmed over the guns of Fort Amsterdam, carried the great fort in ten minutes, though held by 300 regular troops. The governor of the town was found in the fort half-dressed and more than half asleep. When Brisbane, sword in hand, burst into his room, he sulkily surrendered.

There still remained Fort Republique, whose batteries were heavy enough to sink the British frigates as they lay, with topsails aback, under its walls. The British ships, however, opened fire on the fort; 300 seamen and marines marched to attack it at the rear; at ten o'clock the Dutch flag above the fort fluttered down, and Curaçoa was captured. Here was a rich and powerful colony, in a word, carried by four British frigates, with a total loss of three men killed and fourteen wounded, the loss in killed and wounded on the part of the Dutch amounting to 200 men. This must be pronounced a very brisk morning's work, even for British sailors! British diplomatists, it may be added, in their customary manner, duly handed the island back when peace was proclaimed, with almost more expedition than Brisbane and his gallant sailors had shown in capturing it.

CHAPTER XX

A PERISHED NAVY

WITH the great defeat of Trafalgar the naval power of France, for the moment at least, came to utter wreck. The obstinate will and amazing genius of Napoleon sooner or later would, no doubt, have created new fleets. Napoleon was, as a matter of fact, slowly filling the closely blockaded harbours of France with new ships of the line, when, after the retreat from Moscow, his empire came to an end. But the thunderstroke of Trafalgar, as its immediate effect, swept the French flag from the sea. One fragment of the great fleet which escaped Nelson's guns on October 21, 1805, was captured by Sir Richard Strachan on November 4, only a fortnight afterwards. Another fragment, after lying ignobly in Cadiz for three years, was surrendered on June 14, 1808, when the Peninsular war broke out. Dundonald's fireships in the Basque Roads on April 11, 1809, robbed France of her last squadron.

The arithmetic of the struggle with France, on its naval side, shows how complete was the victory of England. In 1805 the British captured from the

French twenty-two line-of-battle ships and five frigates. In 1806 British captures only amounted to eight ships of the line and thirteen frigates, and of these one ship of the line and four frigates were Spanish or Dutch. In 1807 not a single French line-of-battle ship or frigate was captured; the reason being that, in open waters, none remained to be captured. The French flag, except where it flew from the mast of some lurking privateer, had vanished from the open sea! British seamen that year, it is true, reaped a rich harvest. They captured no less than twenty line-of-battle ships and fourteen frigates; but they were all Dutch, Danish, or Turkish. In 1808 the British captured eight line-of-battle ships and six frigates. But two of the line-of-battle ships were Dutch; the remaining six were the French ships surrendered at Cadiz when Spain broke into revolt.

In 1809 France had begun to rebuild her fleet, and the British captured or destroyed six ships of the line and sixteen frigates. But Dundonald's exploit in the Basque Roads explains those figures. After the Basque Roads no French line-of-battle ship was captured until 1812, when the *Rivoli*, a 74-gun ship, became a prize to the *Victorious* in the Gulf of Venice. If we take the eight years betwixt 1805-12, the British captured, in all, from their enemies sixty-five ships of the line and seventy-six frigates; they lost during that same period not one line-of-battle ship. The total British losses to the enemy, reckon-

ing down to the most petty variety of armed craft, averages less than eight per annum.

These figures show how absolute was the British victory on the sea. The chief sorrow of British captains during those years, indeed, arose from the fact that there was, practically, nobody to fight. The English flag flew in haughty and almost unchallenged defiance on all the open seas of the world.

Sir Richard Strachan's action, which is a sort of glittering postscript to Trafalgar, deserves a brief description. Five of Villeneuve's ships who flew the French flag, in addition to six Spaniards, made their way from the great fight of October 21 into Cadiz, and Collingwood instantly established over that port a vigilant and threatening guard. Four French ships under Rear-Admiral Dumanoir—the *Formidable*, his flag-ship, of eighty guns, the *Scipion*, the *Mont Blanc*, and the *Duguay-Trouin*, all seventy-fours—made their escape southward. But all ports were sealed against the French admiral. He resembled a fox with his covert stopped and the hounds in full pursuit. Louis, with a squadron of five ships, barred his approach to Toulon, and Dumanoir turned the stems of his ships northward, intending to reach the Isle of Aix.

On November 2 a British frigate, the *Phoenix*, cruising off Cape Finisterre, discovered four great ships to the northward. The little *Phoenix*, a frigate of the smallest size, instantly started in pursuit of

these four giants ! They turned out to be Dumanoir's ships, and these, in their turn, proceeded to hunt the *Phoenix*, eager to revenge on it the sorrows of Trafalgar ! Its captain knew that a squadron under Sir Richard Strachan was cruising off Ferrol, and cleverly led his pursuers in that direction. At three o'clock that afternoon Strachan's ships were duly sighted to the southward. Dumanoir's squadron, at that apparition, instantly hauled their wind, wore, and stood to the east ; whereupon the *Phoenix* promptly assumed, once more, the rôle of the pursuer, signalling vehemently, meanwhile, to attract the attention of the ships to the southward. Two other British frigates, the *Boadicea* and the *Dryad*, drawn by the sound of guns, made an appearance on the scene and joined in the pursuit.

The incidents that followed are an amusing example of the chances of sea-warfare. It was a black and starless night. The *Boadicea* and *Dryad* threw up friendly rockets as signals to the *Phoenix* and the mysterious ships coming up from the south ; but, failing to get any reply, after running down near enough to the approaching squadron to discover they were two-deckers, the *Boadicea* and *Dryad* bore up, and vanished from the scene over the horizon. The *Phoenix*, confident that the approaching squadron was British, though no flags were visible, ran fearlessly down to the leading ship. It was the *Cæsar*, of eighty guns, Strachan's flag-ship. The big ship

remained majestically inattentive to the eager signals of the little *Phœnix*, and only after a shot had been actually fired at it was the ill-treated *Phœnix* allowed to approach the *Cæsar* and tell its news. When the moon rose Strachan was able to discover, ghost-like against the horizon, the sails of Dumanoir's squadron.

Then followed a stubborn chase, through wild and misty weather, which lasted till the morning of November 5. One of Strachan's ships, the *Bellona*, in that long chase, somehow, lost touch with her consorts and vanished. A stray British frigate, the *Révolutionnaire*, on the other hand, was caught in the vortex of the chase and added itself to Strachan's force. The French ships were faster than the English, and all Strachan's skill and seamanship failed to enable his heavy two-deckers to overtake their quarry. The two British frigates, however, hung on the French rear. With nimble seamanship they kept the *Scipion*, Dumanoir's slowest seventy-four, under constant and tormenting fire, and yet escaped its heavy guns, which might have sunk either of them at a stroke. With such skill and persistency were these tactics maintained, that at last Dumanoir had to choose betwixt abandoning his consort or turning on his pursuers. He chose the more gallant course, and a fight of singular obstinacy followed.

The combat was notable for one curious incident. Strachan, a man of hot and vehement temper, at the height of the fight discovered that one of his ships,

the *Namur*, was not obeying with sufficient ardour the signal for "close action;" and he fired two wrathful shots at that vessel by way of adding emphasis to his signal! That a British admiral, engaged in desperate combat with an enemy of equal strength, should deem it necessary to expend some shots upon one of his own ships, was a marine scandal of startling quality. The *Namur*, it turned out, had its main-yard cut in two by a French shot. Her part in the fight was sufficiently gallant, and she captured her own particular antagonist, the *Formidable*. The British lost 135 killed and wounded, but the whole of Dumanoir's squadron was captured, every ship being dismasted, while the number of killed and wounded amounted to no less than 730. Strachan's action was a bit of fighting not unworthy to be a sequel to Trafalgar. At its close, of the proud fleet which Villeneuve led out of Cadiz on October 20, there remained only those sealed up in Cadiz.

The war on the sea from this date includes no fleet actions, though it still supplies some picturesque incidents and not a few gallant actions. One of the most striking naval incidents of the whole war, indeed, is supplied by the story of what is called the Diamond Rock. A mile south-west of Martinique, and six miles south-east from Port Royal, a splinter of basalt rises suddenly from the sea to a height of 600 feet, its whole circumference measuring less than a mile. On three sides it is vertical, and the perpendicular

face of rock on which the sea breaks is mottled with great caves. On the west some reefs jutting out into the sea, offer a perilous and uncertain landing-place. At the end of 1803 Hood was blockading Port Royal, and he determined to occupy the Diamond Rock for the purpose of making his blockade more effective.

None but a sailor would have dreamed of such an exploit, and only a sailor could have accomplished it. Hood's ship was the *Centaur*, of seventy-four guns, and the Diamond Rock rose high above its mast-heads. The problem was to carry five heavy guns up to a height thrice that of the *Centaur's* topmast. It was perilous for the *Centaur* to lie too close to the steep wall of rock, up which the surges flung their spray; but the great guns had to be hoisted through the air from her decks to the summit of the rock. A cable was carried from the *Centaur's* deck to the crest of the Diamond Rock, and the guns dragged up it suspended in a "traveller" or running loop. A spectator who watched the process, and saw Hood's tars dragging up 24-pounders by hawsers to a cliff 600 feet high, describes them as "appearing like mice hauling a little sausage!" Five guns, in this fashion, were mounted on the rock; one of the ship's lieutenants with 120 men and boys formed its crew, and the "Diamond Rock" made its appearance in the British navy-list as "a sloop of war!"

Its position, and the great range of its guns, made the Diamond Rock a source of great annoyance to the French; and when in 1805 Villeneuve's fleet, newly escaped from Toulon, made its appearance in the West Indies and anchored in Port Royal, the "sloop of war Diamond" became an intolerable nuisance. It fired at everything that came within its reach. The whole trade of Port Royal was interrupted. Villeneuve, lying with a great fleet in a French port, had to suffer the indignity of listening to the continual roar of English guns from the tiny battery high in air, outside Port Royal, and the insult became past endurance. At last a squadron, consisting of two French line-of-battle ships, two frigates, and eleven gunboats was despatched to suppress this too impertinent "sloop of war." It was a contest betwixt an entire French squadron and 120 British sailors with five guns perched on the summit of a splinter of rock!

Maurice, the lieutenant in command of the Diamond Rock, abandoned his lower battery, consisting of two guns. He could fight only with one 24-pounder, perched half way up the rock, and two 18-pounders on its summit. The French squadron opened fire at eight o'clock on the morning of May 31, and they bombarded the rock for three angry and industrious days. They succeeded in those three days in killing only two men and wounding one other, while steadily from the solitary

24-pounder on its flank, and the two 18-pounders on its summit, the Diamond Rock spat back at its assailants. The British sailors actually sank three French gunboats and two rowing-boats, and killed or wounded some seventy Frenchmen with their fire. Then, having fired almost his last cartridge, Maurice hauled down his flag, and H.M. ship of war the Diamond Rock, disappeared from the British navy list. But its record was certainly picturesque, and cannot be regarded as inglorious. To have armed it was a remarkable feat of ingenuity; and an entire French squadron was required to suppress it.

The naval fighting of that period supplies another example of what can only be described as humorous audacity on the part of British sailors. On February 18, 1804, a straggling flock of some sixteen Indiamen off Pulo Auro discovered four strange sail coming up fast from the south-west. The Indiamen were bluff-bowed wall-sided craft, deep with merchandise, with rusty sides and stained canvas, and scanty crews. But in those stern days even the peaceful British merchant seaman had to keep with cutlass and cannon-shot the goods he carried. The Indiamen carried guns and knew how to use them. An Indiaman's guns, indeed, were commonly of an obsolete type, and it was the fashion to lash the butts of water for use during the voyage betwixt the guns. Thus, for warlike purposes, they were not very efficient; but their scanty crews included much

good fighting material, and their captains, with sufficient training, might have conned into action Nelson's ships at Trafalgar. The captains of the sixteen Indiamen in question had appointed one of their own number, Captain Dance of the *Earl Camden*, as commodore, and Dance, as it turned out, fought his squadron with a skill and audacity which would have delighted Nelson himself.

The French squadron in sight consisted of a 74-gun ship, the *Marengo*, two heavy frigates and two corvettes, all under the command of Rear-Admiral Linois. Linois was in these waters for the express business of intercepting the China fleet, and he now had found his prey! With a powerful French squadron hanging to windward of them, the heavy Indiamen might have been expected to spread every inch of their tarry canvas, and to turn their stems to every quarter of the compass for the purpose of escape. It was on this Linois calculated; and the British merchantmen, in that case, would have been to the French like fat ducklings to a flock of hawks.

But this cluster of heavy-sterned and pacific Indiamen proceeded to behave in a quite unexpected fashion. "Commodore" Dance took his duties seriously, and gravely signalled to four of his heaviest ships to run down and examine the strangers. Four clumsy Indiamen thereupon solemnly bore up towards the French squadron, and approached the puzzled Frenchmen until their commodore recalled them.

Dance next formed his sixteen Indiamen in line of battle, but kept on his course under easy sail. At nightfall the French were well up with the Indiamen, whereupon Dance faced about, and the French ships drew off to wait for the next day. Linois calculated that the merchantmen, under cover of night, would scatter and endeavour to escape, when the swifter Frenchmen would have picked them up one by one as their prey. But Dance knew his business better than to show any sign of fear.

All night long the Indiamen lay-to in order of battle, with lights flaming and men at quarters. Linois kept to windward of the fleet within short distance and closely studied these puzzling Indiamen. Dance had ordered three of his heaviest ships to hoist the blue ensign and so give the impression they were ships of war; but Linois was not in the least deceived. He knew he saw before him nothing but a cluster of fat merchantmen. Yet their cool order, and their visible readiness to fight, had a discouraging effect. At nine o'clock, as the Frenchmen showed no signs of coming down, the Indiamen fell off, and under easy sail—but still in line of battle—kept on their course; whereupon the Frenchmen filled on the opposite tack and edged away in pursuit. By one o'clock Linois threatened to cut off the rearmost merchantmen, whereupon Dance, as though he had been an admiral trained under Nelson, made the signal to tack in succession and bear down on the Frenchmen.

In close order, the *Royal George*, a matronly looking ship, heading the column, the gallant merchantmen came on with bellying topgallant sails. Here, in a word, was a flock of British merchant ships actually *attacking* a squadron of French ships of war! Towards two o'clock Linois opened fire on the *Royal George* and the ships astern of her; but the sturdy Indiaman, who by this time had cleared her water-butts and got her guns in fighting order, fired back with unabashed courage, and ship after ship coming up joined in the fray. This curious fight lasted for three-quarters of an hour; then Linois found the Indiamen too much for him. His ships hauled their wind and stood away under all sail to the eastward. The triumphant Dance threw out a signal for "a general chase," and for nearly two hours there was witnessed the astonishing spectacle of a fleet of exasperated British merchantmen pursuing a squadron of French ships of war! It was as though a cluster of indignant fowls were chasing a number of half-astonished and half-alarmed bull-dogs, suspected of felonious designs on their chickens!

At four o'clock Commodore Dance drew off his fleet and the Indiamen resumed their voyage. It is sometimes asserted that Linois was deceived by Dance's trick of hoisting the blue flag, and drew off from the fight in the belief that he was engaging ships of war. But this was not the case. Linois knew perfectly well that his antagonists were merely

merchant ships. He was too experienced a sailor to mistake the straggling fire of an Indiaman for the broadsides of a British seventy-four. The merchant sailors owed their triumph to their own cool courage, and to the gallant comradeship which made them stand by each other. England was accustomed to see her ships of war beat French ships of the same class with themselves; but that a flock of merchant ships should, in this fashion, meet a powerful French squadron under a famous admiral and drive it off in mere flight, was a quite delightful novelty. Dance was knighted and received a grant of £5000. The captains and crews of the various Indiamen were overwhelmed with gifts; and the tale of how these merchant captains had out-manceuvred and out-fought a French squadron became one of the classic stories of British naval history.

CHAPTER XXI

THE BASQUE ROADS

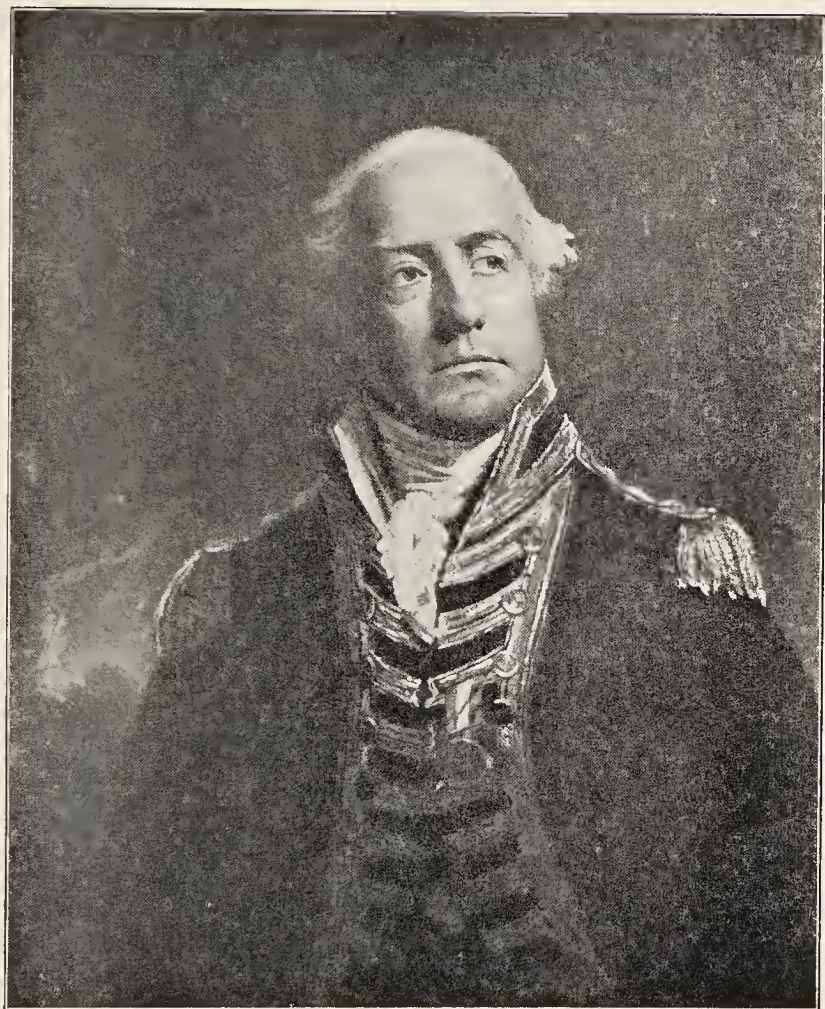
THE tale of how Cochrane with his fireships destroyed in the Basque Roads what, in a sense, was the last fleet of France, is a story of mingled glory and shame: glory for the gallant seaman who performed a feat so desperate, and shame for the politicians and officials who sacrificed the hero of that exploit to secure a party triumph.

During the early days of 1809, Lord Gambier was keeping a somewhat drowsy watch over Brest, where a strong French squadron, consisting of nine line-of-battle ships—one of 120 guns—and two frigates was lying. A sharp westerly gale blew Gambier off his station; the French ships came promptly out, swept past L'Orient, driving away the British ships keeping guard there, added the French ships in that port to their number, and dropped anchor in the Aix Roads. The orders of the French admiral, Willaumez, directed him to sail on the first chance to West Indian waters, relieve Martinique, then threatened by the British, and generally to harass British trade in those seas.

Gambier, gathering his wind-blown ships together,

was soon on guard over the Isle d'Aix. Gambier was the sort of admiral that delights a department: docile, commonplace, a creature of routine, who would rather miss a victory than violate an official propriety. But though such a commander, from the official point of view, has his merits, he has also his inconveniences. He suits easy times but fails at a crisis. Gambier, too, was growing old; he had become "religious;" but his religion was not the wholesome and noble force which acts as a tonic on every faculty. It was a gentle and melancholy sentiment, which exhausted itself in the distribution of tracts amongst the seamen of the fleet. The Admiralty, in the interests of its own comfort, preferred the docile Gambier to a Nelson or a St. Vincent; yet, if the French broke out of the Aix Roads and reached the West Indies, that event might produce a storm of popular wrath in England which would shake the Cabinet. Gambier was officially urged to attack Willaumez's fleet with fireships; but to this Gambier objected that the process was "hazardous" if not "desperate;" it was even worse—it was "unchristian." Nevertheless, with that docility which endeared him to his superiors, Gambier added he was willing to make the attempt if "my Lords" took the responsibility of ordering it. But the "responsibility" for what might prove a failure was exactly what "my Lords" did not covet. Yet something must be done.

In these straits Lord Mulgrave, the First Lord,



LORD GAMBIER

From an engraving after the portrait by SIR WILLIAM BEECHEY, R.A.

looked round for some officer of more originality and daring than Gambier, who would, on his own initiative, do what Gambier thought too hazardous, if not too wicked, to be attempted—one who would not claim an inconvenient share of credit if he succeeded, and who might be conveniently sacrificed if he failed. Such a man he found to his hand in Lord Cochrane, who, with his single frigate, the *Impérieuse*, had kept the whole coast of Spain in terror. Cochrane was, at almost every point, the exact antithesis of Gambier. In the whole gallery of great British seamen his is perhaps the most dazzling, original, and perplexing figure. He was a Scotchman, with the shrewd-brained sagacity of his race. But of what may be called the *douce* side of the Scottish character—its prudence, its coolness, its tact, its heavy-footed common sense—Cochrane knew nothing. In war he showed an infinite sort of impish address, and an audacity of daring which made him the terror of his enemies. He had, too, a mechanical genius—used only for purposes of war—which, employed for ends of peace, might have enriched civilisation. There is no other chapter in the naval history of Great Britain quite so amusing, or so stirring, as the story of Cochrane's exploits in the *Speedy* and in the *Impérieuse*.

But Cochrane was the type of commander which the official mind hates: wilful, original, rash of temper, incontinent of speech, with a genius not only

for quarrelling with his superiors, but for proving himself right and them wrong. Cochrane, in a word, was guilty of almost every official sin; but then he had exactly the genius to invent a scheme for destroying the French fleet lying in the Basque Roads, and the audacity to carry out what he proposed. The plan might be unconventional, but it would almost certainly be effective; and as for "responsibility," Cochrane was only too eager to take all the blame, or all the glory, on his own shoulders.

Lord Mulgrave sent for Cochrane and proposed the adventure to him. Cochrane, in reply, allowed the Scotch side of his intellect to speak. A junior officer sent out to Gambier's fleet to undertake an exploit which that admiral pronounced "too hazardous," would occupy a very trying position. His mere presence would be an affront to the pride of the whole fleet. He would have to command or displace officers senior to himself. Cochrane pointed all this out to Lord Mulgrave and demurely refused the commission. Mulgrave, however, was persistent. The prospect of the wild adventure kindled the knight-errant side of Cochrane's character. He had assured Mulgrave that to destroy the French fleet in the Basque Roads was "an enterprise of easy execution and little risk," and the chance of proving himself right and Gambier wrong, with all England looking on at the spectacle, was too much for Cochrane's self-restraint. He flung prudence to the winds and undertook the task.

On April 3, Cochrane in the *Impérieuse* reported himself to Lord Gambier in the Basque Roads. The docile Gambier received him with characteristic politeness, but a tempest of anger was kindled throughout Gambier's ships by the news of Cochrane's arrival and the commission with which he was entrusted. A hundred gallant officers in the fleet would have volunteered for any attack on the Frenchmen, no matter how desperate. That they were denied the opportunity of distinguishing themselves, and a junior officer, a mere captain of a cruising frigate, should have been sent from the outside to undertake the destruction of the French fleet, was felt to be a reflection on their courage and seamanship. This mood of feeling became loudly vocal; and Rear-Admiral Harvey, who commanded the *Temeraire* at Trafalgar, discharged the whole wrath of the fleet on Gambier personally. On Gambier's own quarter-deck, and in the presence of a score of officers, he broke into a tempest of anger. Gambier, he declared, was an old woman who did not know his business. Had Nelson been there, he would have dashed at the enemy at once. He himself was prepared "to go in the *Tonnant* (his own ship), or any old rotten seventy-four, board the biggest ship in the enemy's fleet, a three-decker, and bring her out," &c.

That tempest of sea-rage cost Harvey his flag. The Basque Roads business, as a matter of fact, resulted in two great court-martials, one on Harvey for insulting

his commander-in-chief on his own quarter-deck, and another on Gambier for failing to do his duty against the French. Harvey was dismissed the service; Gambier was "honourably acquitted" and received the thanks of Parliament. Yet natural human feeling is on the side of the old Trafalgar hero, rather than on that of the docile and inert Gambier.

Cochrane, unmoved by the tempest of angry feeling about him—perhaps, on the whole, rather enjoying it—set himself with characteristic thoroughness and ingenuity to carry out the adventure entrusted to him. The French fleet—fourteen ships in all, eleven of them being line-of-battle ships—lay anchored in a compact body, and within point-blank shot of strong works upon the Isle d'Aix. The ships were in two lines, about 250 yards apart, with a comparatively narrow front, and anchored by bow and stern.

Three frigates were anchored some 700 yards in advance, as a sort of outguard; a little over 100 yards in advance of the frigates was a gigantic composite boom, forming an obtuse angle. Each wing of the boom was more than half a mile long, and was composed of great spars held together by chains, and moored at short spaces with a double line of heavy anchors. It formed, in Cochrane's own words, "the most stupendous structure of the kind on record."

There was real ingenuity in the French system of defence. The British, to attack, must advance along a narrow channel, fringed with batteries, mottled

Basque Roads

THE ACTION IN THE AIX ROADS

April 11th.-12th. 1809.

- British Vessels
- Position of French Fleet before the destruction of the boom
- French Ships after the destruction of the boom, all but two ran aground

Aix Roads
BOOM
FRIGATES & GUARD BOATS
L'OCÉAN



REDOUT

IMPÉRIEUSE

L'OCÉAN



with shoals, and swept by a tide that rose and sank in those narrow waters some twenty feet vertically. The great boom barred the channel at its narrowest part, and would divert to the mud-banks on either side any fireships sent down before the wind. A strong boat squadron, numbering over seventy launches, guarded the boom from an attack by British boats. It was a proof of Gambier's inertness that he had taken no soundings of the channel, was ignorant of its navigable width, and did not even suspect the existence of the great boom on which the French depended as a shield against an attack by fireships.

In the shelter of their defences, however, the French lay at anchor with entire comfort. They knew that it was no Nelson keeping watch over them outside the Isle d'Aix. They dressed their ships with gaily fluttering flags. One of Willaumez's ships—the *Calcutta*—was an English prize, an Indiaman transfigured into a 50-gun ship, captured by a whole French squadron in 1805. And, with a touch of impish French wit, the British flag, by way of insult, was hung out in sight of the British look-outs under the *Calcutta's* quarter-gallery; an affront of a quality to set the entire British fleet swearing!

Cochrane was in ignorance of the existence of the great French boom; but he was familiar with the soundings of the Basque Roads, and knew it would be possible to take in Gambier's seventy-fours with-

out undue risk from the shore-batteries, or peril of the ships themselves grounding. He proposed, however, to first break up the order of the French fleet, and if possible drive its ships ashore, by launching upon them at midnight a swarm of blazing fireships. The van of this flaming covey was to be occupied by three stupendous explosion vessels. Cochrane thoroughly understood the French imagination and its uneasy sensitiveness. The French would see a swarm of flaming ships driving upon them; the leading ship would explode in one sea-shaking tempest of sound. The second would follow—the third! The French would certainly conclude that all the twelve fireships bringing up the rear were explosion vessels of the same terrifying quality, and would see destruction in its most appalling shape drifting on them. In a fury of alarm they would cut their cables and drift ashore. This is exactly what happened.

Cochrane's explosion vessels were thus addressed not to the French line-of-battle ships, but to the imagination of their crews. They were a mere terrifying preamble to the fireships themselves. And certainly the sea never bore more alarming craft than the explosion ships which Cochrane's genius prepared. A solid floor of logs was built along the whole extent of the ship; the floor thus prepared was crowded with hogsheds into which no less than 1500 casks of gunpowder were emptied. They were bound into a solid mass with great

hempen cables, the interstices filled with sand rammed hard, and the whole fabric roofed over with thousands of shells, hand-grenades, &c. Each explosion vessel was a sort of haystack of gun-powder, thatched with rockets and live shell, and capable of being ignited by a match. Cochrane proposed to command the leading explosion ship in person, with a crew consisting of four seamen and a lieutenant. Perched, that is, on a floating powder-mine, he intended to drift down on the French fleet; behind him a squadron of blazing fireships, in front of him the guns of twelve French line-of-battle ships!

The attack was made on the night of April 11, a night by its wildness and blackness exactly fitted for an adventure so desperate. Gambier's great ships lay nine miles off to windward. Some frigates were stationed in advance to give direction to the fireships. The boats of the fleet were to support the fireships, and they assembled round the *Cæsar* for that purpose; but the sea was too wild for them, and they never stirred from the shelter of the *Cæsar*. The fireships were to have been chained together in groups of four; but, in that wild sea, this would have ensured their destruction, and they were set adrift in units. Cochrane, however, found in the black night, the singing gale, and the furious sea, only the fitting conditions of his exploit. At half-past eight he signalled the fireships to "proceed on service," took

charge of the leading explosion ship himself, cut her moorings loose, and, perched on the summit of 1500 casks of gunpowder, went drifting down through the darkness on to the French fleet!

When within 150 yards of the French frigates which served as outposts, and—although he did not, at the moment, know it—almost touching the French boom, Cochrane made his sailors get into the boat; with his own hand he fired the fuse, and then slipped down a rope into the wildly-tossing boat himself. To pull against wind and sea was an almost hopeless task. The fuse was timed to burn fifteen minutes; it burnt only seven; then, with a far-heard roar that seemed to shake both sky and sea with its blast of sound, and with a leap of white flame that lit up both fleets, the explosion ship went off! Cochrane and his men found themselves beneath a flaming roof of exploding shells; but, fortunately, they were so near the ship that the arch of exploding and flaming missile struck the sea beyond them. “The downward and lateral force of the explosion,” says Cochrane in his account of the adventure, “raised a huge mountain of water, from the breaking of which in all directions our little boat narrowly escaped being swamped.”

But the explosion did more than this. It wrecked the great French boom. “The huge waves caused by the explosion,” says Cochrane, “lifted the boom along its entire length;” it tore the anchors, that

is, from their hold, snapped the iron chains and lashings, or so loosened them that the spars floated loose and were carried away by the tide. The chains sank; and, as with the stroke of a thunderbolt, the huge boom—half a mile on each face—was turned into splinters. The path lay open and clear for the approaching English fireships.

These, as a matter of fact, had been kindled—many of them, at least—prematurely; they were on distracted and diverging courses. Only four of them reached the French line, and not one of them so much as scorched a French sail. They were addressed, however, to French nerves rather than to the French ships, and they served their purpose admirably. On, across the black sea and through sea-wrack and night, they came. They seemed a curve of flaming pyramids, stretching from shore to shore of the narrow sea-way. A second explosion vessel, and a third, went off, filling both night and sea with their dazzling flame and terrifying blast of sound. The crew of each fireship or explosion vessel was by this time struggling back against tide and wind; and so intense was the strain, that, when the blackened, gasping crews at length reached the English frigates, in more than one boat men lay dead, killed by mere fatigue! But the scene in advance of the drifting fireships was dramatic. The French ships were busy cutting their cables and drifting in confusion and terror on the shoals behind them.



LORD COCHRANE

The fireships burnt themselves out. Darkness fell. Soon no point of flame shone on the sea; the clouds of drifting sparks died out in the night-sky. But when the grey dawn broke, the long stretch of the great Palles shoal was mottled with stranded French line-of-battle ships! Some were lying on their bilge; others were casting their guns overboard, and carrying out anchors into the deeper water for the purpose of hauling themselves afloat. Only two French ships rode on an even keel. The mere flaming vision of Cochrane's fireships, the blast of his explosion vessels, had shaken into wreck practically the whole of Willaumez's fleet. Cochrane, looking from the quarter-deck of the *Impérieuse*, beheld a spectacle which filled his fierce nature with delight. He, at least, had done the task which Lord Mulgrave had put into his hands!

But meanwhile, Gambier, with the British fleet, was lying placidly at anchor nine miles off. The incoming tide was beginning to flow; when it was at flood the French ships would probably float again. Cochrane, with a series of emphatic signals, tried to bring his drowsy admiral on to the scene. At six o'clock he signalled, "All the enemy's ships except two are on shore;" in response a single flag crept lazily to Gambier's peak. It was merely the answering pennant.

In a sense it is amusing to study the sharp *crescendo* of Cochrane's signals through the long morning which followed: "The enemy's ships can be destroyed;" "Half the fleet can destroy the enemy;"

"The frigates alone can destroy the enemy;" "The enemy is preparing to heave off," &c. But that *crescendo* of appeals, stretching through a long forenoon, extorted from the pensively meditative Gambier nothing but the careless flick of an answering pennant. At eleven o'clock, it is true, the fleet weighed in leisurely fashion and stood in towards Aix roads; and then, to Cochrane's amazement and wrath, it dropped anchor again. Gambier believed, or affected to believe, there was not water enough for his heavy ships where the French ships had anchored. But his ignorance, if real, was culpable. He might have known better.

By noon the French flagship was afloat. Four others were working frantically to reach the deep water. A single British mortar-vessel was now sent in to bombard the ships; but Cochrane's patience by this time was exhausted. He was in a mood for any wild stroke. He would risk his commission in order to prick his muddy-souled admiral into action. If Cochrane had let the topsails of the *Impérieuse* drop, and had sailed boldly down to the stranded French ships, he would have been promptly recalled; so he had recourse to a trick. He hove his anchor a-trip, and went drifting before the tide, stern foremost, on to the French line. When within gunshot he suddenly made sail, opened fire on the Frenchmen, and then hoisted a signal, "In want of assistance." "I wanted," he says, "to compel the commander-in-chief to send in his ships, in which case," he adds, "I knew their

captains would at once attack the Frenchmen which had not been allowed to heave off and escape."

As Gambier still made no sign, Cochrane hoisted the signal "In distress," though probably at that moment he was the least "distressed" and even the happiest man in the two fleets. He was engaging the *Calcutta*, a ship of fifty guns, with his broadside, sending shot crashing into the hulls of the *Aquilon*, of seventy-four guns, and the *Varsovie*, of eighty guns, which lay aground before him. Cochrane maintained that triangular duel for half-an-hour, and the *Calcutta* actually struck to him, its captain being subsequently court-martialled and shot for striking to a frigate.

By this time even Gambier felt it was necessary to "do something." He could not see a single British frigate fighting a whole French fleet, while twelve British line-of-battle ships looked on as mere disinterested spectators. First the other British frigates, with some lighter vessels, were sent into the fight; then the *Valiant* and the *Revenge*, two seventy-fours; the *Theseus* followed. Some picturesque fighting ensued, and the *Naval Chronicle* of the period contains the letter of a midddy of thirteen on board an 18-gun brig, which took part in the combat. This British boy describes how each British ship coming into the fight, as it passed Cochrane gave him three cheers. His own particular brig devoted itself to *L'Aquilon*, of 80 guns, hanging on the Frenchman's stern and tormenting it with broadsides, till the

great ship struck. "I believe," writes the delighted youth, "that we are the first brig of 18 guns that ever took a line-of-battle ship!"

Night came quickly on, and during the night Gambier called off his ships, Cochrane in the *Impérieuse* doggedly holding on to his position. In the morning he was preparing to renew the action, but was recalled by express and diligently repeated orders from Gambier. As he proved obstinate, a captain his senior was sent in to "relieve" him. Four French line-of-battle ships had been destroyed; the remainder of Willaumez's ships had escaped into the Charente in a half-dismantled condition, and the last fleet of France was practically destroyed as a fighting force. But it is impossible to deny that, in the business of the Basque Roads, a great opportunity, secured by the genius and audacity of Cochrane, was at least half thrown away by Gambier's want of enterprise, or by his jealousy of his audacious and undecorously brilliant junior.

Cochrane's contribution to the drama of the Basque Roads would have moved the generous envy of Nelson, while the part Gambier played kindles nothing but contempt. But the ironies of history are startling. For his part in the Basque Roads Gambier received the solemn thanks of both Houses of Parliament; Cochrane's reward was his professional ruin. He notified Ministers that he would oppose in the House of Commons the vote of thanks

to Lord Gambier. Gambier, on this, demanded a court-martial in order to clear himself. The records of that court-martial are a scandal to justice. By a judicious selection of witnesses, and by an ingenious tampering with charts, "an honourable acquittal" was won for Gambier. His condemnation would have been for Ministers themselves a political disaster, and no art was spared to escape that calamity. Cochrane became a marked man; he received, indeed, the order of the Bath for his exploit in the Aix Roads; but he was pursued by an official ill-will which at last drove him from the naval service of his country. Cochrane was, no doubt, sadly deficient in tact and patience. Discretion in him was a non-existent quality. But with fairer and more generous treatment he might have served his country as splendidly as Nelson or as St. Vincent.

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